AUGUST
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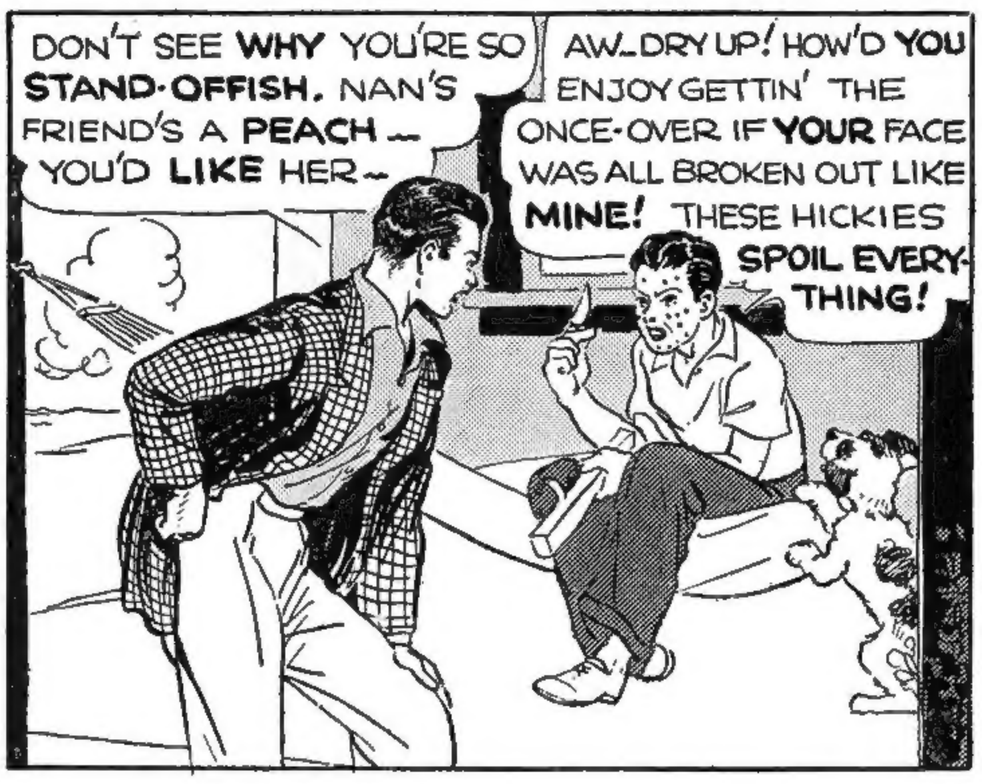
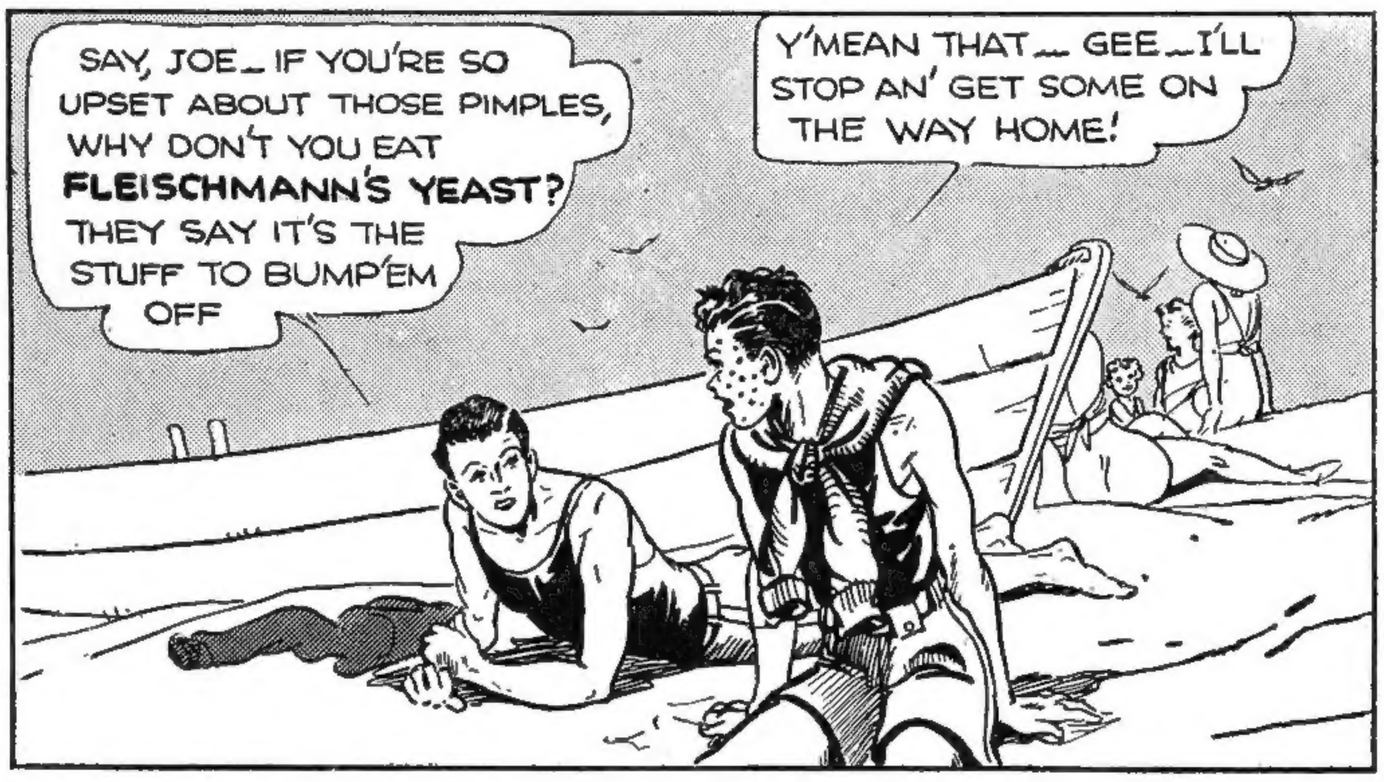
Adventure
A POPULAR PUBLICATION
HAROLD LAMB'S
KEEPER OF THE GATE
L. G. BLOCHMAN
RICHARD H. WATKINS
COMMANDER ELLSBERG
AUGUST
ADVENTURE
15 Cents

JOE'S VACATION LOOKED LIKE A WASHOUT UNTIL—


DON'T SEE WHY YOU'RE SO STAND-OFFISH. NAN'S FRIEND'S A PEACH — YOU'D LIKE HER—
AW—DRY UP! HOW'D YOU ENJOY GETTIN' THE ONCE-OVER IF YOUR FACE WAS ALL BROKEN OUT LIKE MINE! THESE HICKIES SPOIL EVERY-THING!

JOE GIVES ME A PAIN—WON'T GO ANYWHERE JUST BECAUSE HE'S GOT A BATCH OF HICKIES ON HIS FACE
IS THAT WHAT'S WRONG? WHY, THE POOR BOY! BOB, YOU OUGHT TO TELL HIM ABOUT FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST


SAY, JOE—IF YOU'RE SO UPSET ABOUT THOSE PIMPLES, WHY DON'T YOU EAT FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST? THEY SAY IT'S THE STUFF TO BUMP 'EM OFF
Y'MEAN THAT— GEE—I'LL STOP AN' GET SOME ON THE WAY HOME!

LISTEN, VICKY— THIS NEXT SONG'S ESPECIALLY FOR YOU
OLD JOE'S MAKIN' UP FOR LOST TIME
OUR TIP ABOUT FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST CERTAINLY FIXED HIM UP!

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by clearing skin irritants out of the blood

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KEEPER OF THE GATE

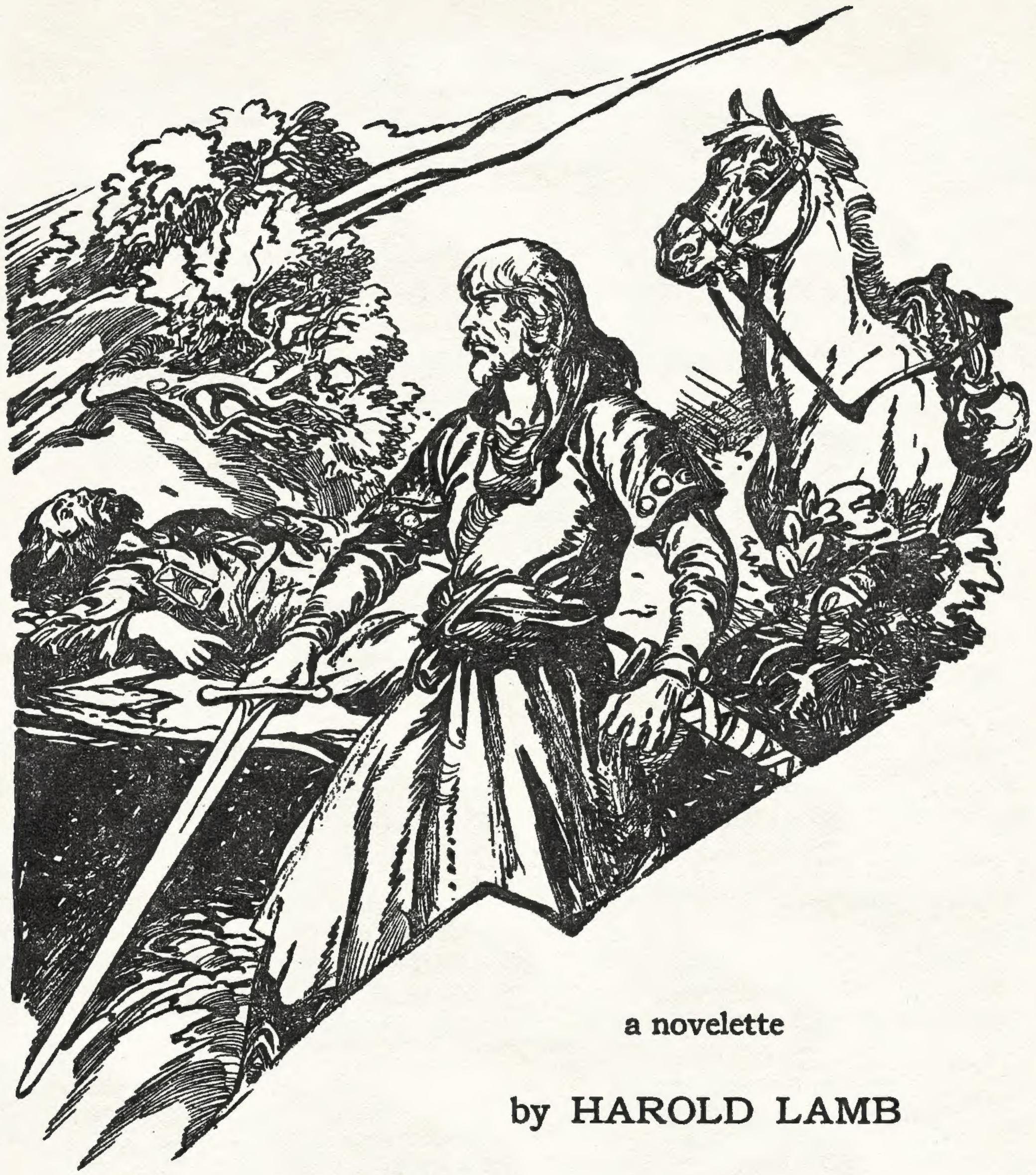
CHAPTER I

MASTER OF THE HAWKS

THE road ran straight as an arrow's flight over the red clay plain. But the plain itself rose and fell, in swell after swell, as if it were a motionless sea on which floated black rocks and a scum of gray tamarisk. A haze of dust shut it in on all sides, veiling the skyline. Through this veil burned the mid-afternoon sun.

Broad wooden wheel tracks and round camel pads, cut by the sharper hoofs of horses and laden donkeys, marked the line of the road. The dung had been picked up and carried off to be dried for fuel. Only down in a gully, under a grove of wind stripped poplars, were men to be seen.

They had been watering their animals at the well, in a nest of limestone rock. And, being Afghans, they lingered to dispute among themselves, idly hopeful that plunder might come their way along the caravan road. Like heavy-headed birds of prey they squatted in the shade,



a novelette

by HAROLD LAMB

wrapped in their striped *abas*, with long knives in their girdles.

So far, they had seen nothing promising pass by—herds of sheep and black goats, a well guarded caravan with rice up from Ghazna, hastening in to the orchards of Samarkand a few hours' travel to the west. At about this point the road left the fertile land by the Samarkand River and entered the Kizil Kum, the Red Sands. Beyond the Kizil Kum the road ascended through the foothills to the high plateaus known as the Roof of the World. And beyond this barrier, far to the east, lay Cathay, the dominion of Kublai Khan.

At the sound of hoofs the Afghans turned on their haunches to stare at a single rider coming from Samarkand. After a glance they settled back again, seeing no hope of loot in him.

For one thing, he had light saddlebags. The white felt coat rolled and tied to the saddle behind him was that of a Tartar officer. These Afghans had found it unwise to meddle with the Tartars, who ruled all the world they knew with an iron hand. Yet this rider was

not a Tartar. He did not crouch in the saddle with shortened stirrups, but held erect his long straight body clad in a loose tunic of chamois leather. The sun-bleached hair that fell to his shoulders was the color of ripe wheat. His eyes were casual and blue, although his face with its high cheekbones was almost as dark as their own.

Every one of them glanced enviously at the clean-limbed bay mare he rode and looked curiously at the long sword with plain hilt and leather sheath slung to his hip. Unlike the Tartars, he carried no bow or shield.

"*Awafikh!*" One of them rose to greet him. "Thy health! Dismount and sit. Let thy horse drink."

The stranger smiled.

"There is no need, O brothers of the road. May Allah not turn his face from ye!"

And he trotted on without a backward glance, which in itself was a matter for surprise. They grunted and talked him over.

"He speaks Arabic like a *hadji*—nay, like one born among the people of the tents. Surely he hath come from afar. The horse is worth more than silver, it is worth gold. But he rides alone. Then, verily, in a little while will we see the others of his band coming after."

The stranger, however, was alone. He was traveling faster than the caravans, and he disliked the delay and confusion of the mixed bands that filled the great road to the East. And, as the Afghans had suspected, he came from a far place.

Nial he was, Nial o'Gordon, with no land to claim for his own. Born in a crusader's frontier castle overlooking the gorge of the Jordan, a Scot by blood, he had been driven out of Palestine by the victorious Moslems. Weaned and trained in the East, he had found no tie to hold him to England, and no kin who would do aught for a wandering son of a crusader. He was no more than twenty years old, and he had a longing to make his way through the barriers to Cathay where the great khan reigned.

From Constantinople Nial had sailed to the sea gate of the Golden Horde, where his swordsmanship had kept life in him and brought him reward from Barka khan of the Horde. In that year he had learned to speak with the Tartars, and he carried sewn to the inner side of his belt a bronze tablet certifying that he had served faithfully as *gurkhan* of the Golden Horde. He had, besides, enough gold to take him far on his road.

After riding half a mile beyond the well, he halted on a rise and let his horse nose the ground while he watched the track behind him. The Afghans looked as if they were on the prowl, and he wanted to see whether any of them had decided to come after him. He did make out one horseman surmounting a ridge with red dust spurting behind him.

But the man was alone, going at a steady gallop. Soon Nial heard a distant jingle of bells, and made out that the oncoming rider was unarmed, with nothing carried on the saddle—a Tartar courier, going at racing speed to the next post station. Those Afghans would never molest the messenger.

The courier swept down into the last hollow and disappeared. With an abrupt jangle the sound of the bells ceased. Nial waited, listening. He heard a confused clatter, as if horses were stamping over loose stones. Then nothing at all.

NIAL picked up his rein after a moment and turned back along the trail. Odd that such a rider should have been thrown on an open road. The man would have halted for nothing else. He might have been hurt, and Nial would need to catch the horse and bring him along to the station.

As he had expected, Nial saw the courier lying motionless in the bottom of the hollow near a grove of dense tam-

arisk. The horse had vanished. He dismounted beside the Tartar and bent over him quickly. The courier's body had been slashed through to the backbone beneath the ribs; and he was dead, although his blood was still draining into the sand.

Turning him over, Nial saw that the long leather case fastened to his belt had been ripped open. Whatever he had carried had been stolen, and the man himself slain out of hand. In the patches of sand around the body Nial traced the tracks of two horses that had come out to the road, barring the way. The slayers had gone off at once, down the gully, to keep clear of the skyline.

Then Nial sprang up, catching at his sword. Something moved behind the screen of tamarisk. Two horses trotted out, and their riders drove at him before he had a chance to mount. As he braced himself, swinging his blade back of his shoulder, he saw that the scimitar of the nearer man was stained with blood. And it flashed through his mind that they had surely seen him coming over the ridge and had turned back to put him out of the way as he knelt over the body.

Even as he thought, he leaped his own length to one side—from the left hand to the right of the horseman who was already bringing down his scimitar in a slash. The sudden move caught the man unaware, and he tried to turn his blade as he shifted in the saddle and jerked at his horse.

But Nial, with both feet planted firmly on the ground, swung his long sword savagely. The horse could not be checked in time, and the steel blade swept down over its head, brushing back the scimitar and biting deep over the hips of the rider.

"Y'allah!" The man screamed, straightening convulsively in his stirrups and falling heavily as Nial pulled the sword clear, turning in time to parry a slash from the second rider.

The man galloped by and pulled in for a moment to stare malevolently at the tall wanderer. Then, clapping his stirrups against the ribs of his horse, he galloped back toward the well, keeping to the road.

Nial listened until he was sure that the surviving slayer had gone off in earnest. Then he went to inspect the man he had cut from the saddle, who had lived only a few moments after striking down the unarmed courier—a tall man in a wolfskin *chaban*, smelling like a wolf. A black lambskin hat lay beside him, and from under his arm the end of a silver tube projected. Nial drew it out and looked at it curiously.

The tube, little more than a foot in length, was of heavy silver inlaid with gold tracery and polished by constant use. The open end had been sealed with red wax and stamped with the impress of a lion's head.

"Faith," the Scot muttered, "there will be more to do about this."

For the lion's head was the *tamgha*—the mark—of Barka Khan, lord of the Golden Horde. The tube, then, had come from Sarai, and it might contain a letter, an urgent command, a summons to war, or precious stones. The courier who had carried it hither in the leather case had been no ordinary post rider; he had been an express rider of the khan, traveling at the utmost speed of his horse toward the East.

To hold up a carrier of the post was a crime calling for death; to slay a courier of the khan was a thing unheard of in the dominion of the Tartars. Yet the two wearers of the black lambskin kalpaks had waited here in the gully to do just that. Had they known that this one rider would carry something of value from the khan? But how could any tidings have come from Sarai ahead of an express? Nial examined the seal again to make sure that it was intact.

Then he went to his horse, drew a silk cloth from one of the saddlebags, wrapped the silver tube carefully and

stowed it in the bag. When he handed it in at the next post station and explained the attack upon the courier, he wanted to be certain that the seal had not been broken.

"Fool!" he exclaimed suddenly, and swung himself into the saddle.

He urged his horse up the slope and glanced over his shoulder.

A quarter mile behind him the tribesman of the black hat was coming up with a half dozen Afghans. Faintly he heard their shout when they sighted him. He tightened his knees, driving the bay mare into a long gallop.

He had to get away from them, and quickly. It would be safer to argue with wild dogs than to try to explain matters to them. The black hat had told his tribesmen his version of the murder. Now the tribesmen were launched on a man hunt, eager for reward if they brought Nial's head in to the Tartars. To throw away the tube would not mend matters; nor could he stand his ground against seven men.

At the next rise he looked back without reining in the mare. The pursuers had not gained on him, and they had scattered a little. Another mile, and he knew that his mare had the speed of them; but he knew as well the endurance of the Afghans' lean ponies, and he forced the mare on while he pondered his chances.

To turn off would be useless in that open plain. They would be watching his tracks; and the ground was becoming more sandy. But by now the post station ought not to be far off. He wondered about that station until he swept around a turn into a camel caravan, making camp by a well, thronged with noisy Tadjiks who ceased their clamor to stare at him when he reined to a halt among them, pointing his finger at the most dignified white beard he could see.

"The *yamkhanah*—how far is it?" he shouted.

The white beard wagged plaintively.

"*Ai, tura,* oh Lord Protector of the unfortunate ones—"

"How far?"

"Eh, a laden camel goes there in one watch of the day. A lowly fellow such as thy servant walks there in a watch and a half, and—"

But Nial was off down the road. The post station, he guessed, would be less than an hour's gallop, and he dared not waste another moment. To do what he planned he must gain a mile or so on his pursuers, and he must sacrifice the mare. It would be useless to seek the Tartar officers at the station, hand over the khan's missive and tell his story. By now the Afghans would be ready to swear that they had all seen him slay the courier. There was blood on his sword, and he was fleeing from them.

"Nay, lass," he whispered, "there is no other road. So hie thee on."

THE mare bore him well and kept her feet among the stones. When he sighted the haystacks of the station the tribesmen were not in sight. At the gate of the guardhouse he reined in, shouting impatiently:

"A messenger from Barka Khan, Lord of the West and the East! Bring out a fast horse, a good horse."

He had put on his white felt *chaban* and had slung his saddlebags over one shoulder. As he dismounted, several men in long blue coats rose from their seats and ran with a curious, bowlegged waddle toward the line of horses waiting ready saddled outside the pen. The ring of command in Nial's voice was unmistakable, and the Tartars had learned obedience from infancy.

"Nay," Nial cried impatiently. He had cast his eye over the half dozen remounts and made his own choice. "Not the gray pony. Am I a boy in weight? The piebald horse with the mane!"

The grooms hastened to lead out the long-limbed, Turkoman bred horse and,

as he flung his bags over the saddlehorn, Nial prayed inwardly that he had made a good choice. The piebald looked like a famished brute, but it must have speed in those long legs.

A tall Mongol* in horsehide boots—the *darogha*, or officer, of the station—came up. Nial greeted him courteously but briefly as he mounted and would have spurred off. The officer caught his rein and stared curiously at his light bags.

"*Kiap seme kene*," he ventured. "Swiftly thou ridest."

"Ay, swiftly." Nial nodded, forcing himself to show not the least impatience. "For I carry that which is sealed by the seal of Barka Khan."

The Mongol grunted understanding, but pointed down the road to several black specks drawing nearer in the drifting dust.

"And they also, they come as if the ghost wind follows after. What are they?"

"Have I the eyes of an eagle, to see what is hidden and afar?" Nial lifted his rein. "Nay, I may not sit here like a woman with a burden, to see what comes upon the road."

Reluctantly the Mongol officer stepped back. The Scot puzzled him and the approaching riders stirred his curiosity, but it was impossible to delay a messenger of the khan of the Golden Horde. Nial lashed the piebald with the end of the rein and thrilled with satisfaction. The horse was away with a bird-like swoop, head up and muzzle tossing restlessly—a steppe bred racer, accustomed to keeping to a gallop for hours and expecting no mercy from its rider.

Until sunset he pushed on steadily, noticing that he was climbing out of the loose sand into bare foothills covered with dwarf oaks. With the last of the light he paused to breathe his horse and think.

Thanks to his choice of the piebald Turkoman the pursuit was far behind and below him. But he had caught glimpses of a score of horsemen, and he knew that some of the Tartars of the station, led perhaps by the tall *darogha*, had joined the pursuit. Those men were capable of following the track of a horse over the dry grass of a prairie, and it would be useless to try to throw them off in this brush and sandy clay.

Nor did he dare push on to the next station. He had watched the sky constantly and had seen no pigeons flying high overhead; but messenger pigeons chose their own course and one might have passed him too far off to be seen. Already the clear afterglow of sunset was fading. In a few moments the sky would be dark. It was only a question of hours before word of the murder of the post rider and the loss of the silver tube would go far ahead of him along the road, borne on the wings of the pigeon post. And with these tidings would go his own description—even to his height and way of talking. No, the road was closed to him, and his life at hazard wherever Tartar officers, or Moslem spies who served them, might be met.

If he dared face them—if he circled back to Samarkand, surrendered the silver tube and told his story—he could prove nothing. He had no witness;

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*Two generations before this Genghis Khan had led his Mongols to the conquest of the greater part of Asia and the borderland of Europe. But the Mongols themselves, the warriors of the clan of the Yakka or Great Mongols, formed only a small proportion of his armies. Tartars, Uighurs, Turks, Kipchaks. Kitans (Cathayans) made up the mass of the armies. Like the Romans of Trajan's time, the Mongols dominated the nomad empire, in which other peoples made up the bulk of the fighting forces. Europeans, unable to distinguish between the different clans, christened them all Tartars. In this story the word is used for the warriors of Kublai Khan.

Although at this time the vast empire was nominally under the dominion of Kublai Khan, who resided in China, the two western segments, the Ilkhan Empire and the Golden Horde, were actually independent under the rule of their own khans. Barka Khan, master of the Golden Horde, had his headquarters at Sarai on the lower Volga. His dominion stretched from the steppes of mid-Asia, between Lake Balkash and the Aral sea, westward more than forty-five degrees beyond the border of Poland and Hungary.

the slain tribesman found lying by the courier's body would be a silent witness against him.

There was nothing for him to do but turn from the road and trust to luck to throw off his pursuers in the hours of darkness. He looked to right and left, seeing only the darkening line of distant hills, purple against the faint glow at the edge of the sky. On the right hand the stony bed of a dry stream ran into a gully.

"'Tis no true road," he observed gravely, "but it will lead somewhere."

WHEN the Daughters of the Tomb had swung nine lights of their constellation nearly overhead, and the night was half gone, Nial found himself threading a path on the brow of a hill. On either side thornbush clustered, whispering under a dry wind. But he caught another sound ahead of him, and the piebald horse went forward with new willingness, lifting its head and whinnying.

Nial fancied that wild horses were moving along the trail, but he was careful to bend forward over the saddlehorn, keeping his head down by the neck of the horse, a trick he had learned in night riding with the Tartars. Then he listened, surprised.

A girl's voice sang in the darkness. A fitful, drowsy song, about a wizard who leaped on the wind from mountain summit to peak. The song ceased and saddle leather creaked.

"Ho, thou wandering devil, art thou here? I waited long for thee."

Nial was aware of a shape beside him and the faint scent of dried flowers. Other dark forms appeared, moving slowly along the white clay of the trail —loose ponies, he thought, herded together by the girl. At a word from him she would be off into the night. And he had need of a fresh horse.

He groped forward to catch her rein. Instead his hand fell upon a slender knee that started under his touch.

"*Ai!*" A frightened gasp, and the heavy thongs of a whip stung his wrist as the girl's pony bounded forward.

He heard her cry at the other horses and, before he could make shift to follow, they were all speeding away like startled deer.

The big piebald plunged after them and presently, rounding a bend in the trail, Nial saw a glimmer of light ahead.

Warily he approached it, watching it spread to an open doorway with the vague shapes of up-ended carts and a stone wellhead on either hand. The people of the house were still astir. He caught quick voices and rapid footfalls, and guessed that the girl had come in with her ponies. Out of the doorway came a grizzled Tartar in a loose horsehide coat, carrying a newly lighted torch. Without a word he held the torch close to Nial's head and peered with expressionless eyes into the darkness beyond.

Behind him, as if at a signal, appeared a taller figure—a man of authority in a blue-padded *khalat,* reaching from throat to slippers, with a majestic black beard flowing down to his girdle. His shaven head was covered by a velvet skullcap and his brown eyes dwelt upon Nial quietly.

"Neshavan of the Khosh-khanah I am," he said. "You ride late, O stranger, and alone."

It was more of a question than a statement, and Nial dismounted as courtesy required.

"Alone I come, Neshavan. I wish to change my saddle to another mount. This road is not known to me, and I have far to go before the first light."

The master of the house nodded understandingly.

"Then, my guest, you will honor me by sitting and eating a little of my poor food before taking the road again. Few come along this hill trail."

Nial took his saddlebags over his arm

and surrendered the sweating Turkoman to the Tartar servant, noticing as he did so that the man had a powerful bow ready strung and a case of arrows under his loose coat. The Scot felt the irk of hunger, and he needed information even more than food. If Neshavan invited him to eat he had nothing to fear from this house, and he was hours ahead of the pursuit.

When he followed his host into a long room, dimly lighted, he saw why it was called Khosh-khanah—the Hawk House. The other half of the place was given over to dozens of hawks, drowsing on their perches, ranging from small, shapely ger-falcons to great, brown golden eagles. By the assortment of hoods, jesses and thongs lying about, he suspected that Neshavan trained the falcons himself.

"Aye"—his host followed his glance as they knelt on a clean rug to wash their hands—"my goshawks will take hares. My *bouragut* will bring down a great crane, or attack antelope. Karabek and I have taught them since we were milk brothers together. Now the nobles of Samarkand pay high for Neshavan's falcons, a just price. Will the road of my honored guest take him beyond Talas?"

In the shadowed alcove behind Neshavan a slender shape appeared silently and settled down on the cushions of the rug to watch them. Nial could distinguish a girl's white kerchief and dark eyes. He did not stare, nor did he mention the woman and the horses upon the trail. This was a Moslem household, and therefore the women did not exist—for the eyes of visiting men. Neshavan had not even asked his name, although he was curious enough about the solitary young rider and about the saddlebags under Nial's elbow.

"Who knows?" The Scot guessed that Talas would be the next town on the trail he was following. "*Illah a'lam*—God alone knoweth. Is there not a Tartar *yamkhanah* in Talas?"

"Nay." Neshavan shook his head. "They keep to the great road behind you, that runs through Khodjent to the East. They do not come into these hills except to hunt. Besides, what caravans would go beyond Talas?"

"Is there not a road?" Nial wondered aloud, dipping his fingers into the bowl of rice stew that a servant set between them.

"Once there was a way, from Talas up the river that is called the Gold-bringer. I have heard that in former times many caravans came and went by the river, and the Gate."

"To the East," Nial suggested, because he wished to know.

"To the Far East, through the heights. But now—" Neshavan hesitated—"the Gate is closed."

"Yet there is no snow now, even on the peaks."

"On those peaks the snow lies always—aye, and ancient ice. But the pass that we call the Gate is free of snow now in the hot season. Still, it is not open."

"Allah forbid," Nial ventured lightly, because he wished to find out more, "what harm could come of it? I have a tablet from Barka Khan, and I go where I will."

"Where the Gold Bringer rises from the ground, the command of the khans is not obeyed. A Tartar army could not go through."

A whisper no louder than the rustle of silk came from the alcove, and Neshavan checked his words. His tone changed; he smiled.

"Such are the tales that come down from the hills. Men who have gone up the river say that it is safer to ride with the ghost wind, or to steal a horse from the great herd that Satan drives of nights over the barren lands."

"What did they see to frighten them?"

Neshavan still smiled.

"Nothing. But they heard much and turned back."

Again he fell silent. Karabek, the

Tartar bowman, came to the rug hastily, without apology.

"*Tura,*" he grunted, "two *Kara Kalpaks* ride to thy threshold."

The effect upon the master of the house was instantaneous. His eyes opened wide and he drew a long breath. Then he made a sign with his hand toward the alcove, glanced moodily about the chamber and strode to the door. Nial, hearing horses' hoofs on the hard clay, was at his side—wondering whether a pair of the Tartars, knowing this trail and the Hawk House, had come up.

Instead he saw in the light of a torch held by a servant, two tribesmen who looked like gaunt wolves on weary horses. They wore ragged black lambskin headgear, like that of the two slayers of the courier, and Nial understood how they came to be named *Kara Kalpaks*—Black Hats. The taller of the pair reined forward impatiently, his pony wincing from a prod of the sharp stirrup edge.

"In the name of Allah," he cried, "give us water."

His slant eyes flickered restlessly as Neshavan turned and gravely ordered the man with the torch to fetch a jar. Karabek lingered by the door, bow in hand, tense as a hound scenting game.

"Water," said Neshavan, "thou shalt have, in peace."

He took the filled jar from the servant and stepped forward. The tribesman leaned down and, as Neshavan held out the clay jar, whipped a curved knife from his waistband. Swift as a panther's paw the Black Hat's hand shot out, plunging the knife into Neshavan's throat.

THE master of the Hawk House staggered aside, clutching at the ivory hilt projecting from his beard. Then with a queer whine he collapsed on the ground, blood rushing from his mouth. His slayer had drawn a scimitar and, with no more excitement than if dealing with a jackal, slashed the forearm of the dazed servant holding the torch.

"Strike down the dogs!" he shouted.

A girl's scream rang through the room, and Karabek turned instinctively to catch in his arms the slender figure that darted from the alcove toward the dying Neshavan. And out of the darkness emerged a dozen Black Hats who must have been waiting beyond the torchlight for just this moment. They flung themselves from the saddles, and their leader lifted his head to laugh.

"*Yartak bish yabir*—the young woman awaits ye, O my brothers!"

Nial had drawn his sword instinctively. Seeing bows in the hands of the men who remained in their saddles, he stepped back into the room, caught a glimpse of Karabek carrying the struggling girl into the alcove and picked up his roped saddlebags. The quarrel was not his affair, and it would be sheer folly to stand his ground against these raiders.

But they were on his heels with a rush and, in a hot wave of anger, he whirled at the curtain of the alcove, striking down the sword of the foremost and laying the face of another open with a sidelong slash.

They snarled and hung back, peering into the gloom of the alcove. Then Nial felt a hand on his shoulder and heard Karabek's quiet voice.

"Come."

He stepped back between the curtains, saw Karabek hastening down a passage and ran out into darkness that reeked of cattle and manure. A lantern on the ground guided him to the stable shed, where the Tartar and the girl loosed a horse swiftly.

"Take thine!" Karabek grunted at him, and Nial made out his Turkoman still saddled beside him.

He untied the rein and swung himself into the saddle as the girl ran off, tugging at the halter of a pony. He fol-

lowed her past the shed, down a path that brought them under heavy trees. Here he heard his companion stop and busy herself with the pony's head, putting on a headstall as he judged by the click of the iron bit against rebellious teeth. She was sobbing quietly, while the shouts of the Black Hats echoed in the house behind them, above the screaming of the excited hawks.

Then she must have climbed to the pony's back, for he heard them moving off. He followed.

"Where is your servant, Karabek?" he asked.

He repeated the question before she answered, in a whisper:

"Nay, he was Neshavan's servant and foster-brother. He would not go. *Ai-a*, may God grant that he slays that dog-born dog!"

She would say nothing more, even when they came out upon the road beyond her home and looked back to see a red glare rising among the trees. The Hawk House was burning, and around it the raiders were carrying spoil to their horses. Nial waited, but she was not weeping now.

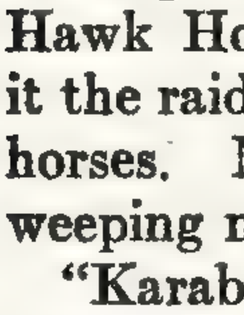
"Karabek has not come," he ventured. "Will you go on to Talas?"

She lifted her head, brushing back the thick tresses from her eyes, and in the starlight he could see only her small white face.

"Why not," she responded calmly. "All places are alike to me now."

CHAPTER II

THE SEAL OF THE KHAN



AFTER the noon prayer the next day, when the streets of Talas were deserted except for black goats, a gaunt *Kara Kalpak* rode at a footpace across the stone bridge, paying no heed to the beggars who sprawled in the shadow of the creaking waterwheel.

Guiding his horse through alleys where the sun beat remorselessly upon clay walls, drawing a stench from the trodden ground, the tribesman glanced from side to side until he came to a rickety wooden door marked with two red stains. They might have been uplifted crimson arms, or rude towers, but they satisfied the *Kara Kalpak* and he dismounted. He yawned, spat, muttered an invocation, "*Hazz-shaitan*—Satan in his abode," fidgeted with his waistband and finally knocked on the door.

It was opened by a lame boy who did not trouble to brush the flies from his sore eyes.

"Hast thou no key?" he exclaimed with the insolence of a child who knows he is protected from harm.

"Nay, little one," the tribesman muttered pacifically, "no key was given me; yet have I gone beyond the Gate."

"So have many," the child sneered. "By what token?"

"I have heard the voice that is not seen."

"What brought thee hither?"

"A message—tidings for him who sits behind the red towers."

"Of silence." The boy laughed, pointing to the marks on the door. "Nay, these are but gateposts and thou art a braying ass without wit. Come and bray."

Without taking offense, the *Kara Kalpak* led his horse into the courtyard, turned him loose in the shade and followed the limping boy up an outer stair to a room on the second floor that overlooked the roofs of Talas. He went slowly, as if coming with empty pockets to a money-lender who held long-overdue interest against him. Leaving his peaked riding slippers on the mat, he advanced slowly into the shadow toward a young Persian who knelt by a low table that bore a silver cup of mastic and sugared fruits. He touched the carpet, then his forehead with his right hand, clumsily as a performing bear.

"*Ai, tura,*" he vouchsafed, "I have tidings from the caravan road for him who sits behind the outer gateposts of silence."

The Persian did not smile. He had fine eyes, bloodshot from too many opiates or too little sleep, and soft, protruding lips. His turban cloth was immaculate white silk.

"I am Mir Farash," he said idly, "a poor interpreter of dreams, but I will hear thy tale."

Squatting on the carpet, the tribesman fingered his beard uneasily.

"As the command came, so it was done," he began. "Two of us waited beyond the first well of the great road. We watched in turn, six—eight days. Then when the sun was high we beheld the light flash twice and twice again from the tower of the ruined mosque above Samarkand. We went down to wait in a gully for the rider of the *yam*. We came out before him, and Yussuf slew him with one stroke when he would have swerved past us."

He paused to glance restlessly behind him at the window.

"The boy watches," Mir Farash observed. "And then?"

"Lord, it was Yussuf who took the silver tube. It bore a Tartar seal."

"Thou hast it not?"

"Yussuf had it. But, Honored One, before we could ride off a strange horseman came to the dying Tartar."

"And ye twain, being greedy of more than payment, lingered to loot him!"

"Nay, by the ninety and nine holy names! We feared that he had seen. He knelt there, unaware—"

The youth's dark eyes flashed.

"He had seen, and yet knelt unsuspecting! What poor lies are these?"

The big tribesman rocked on his haunches. Although he was girdled with weapons and the slender interpreter of dreams looked harmless as a girl, his voice thickened with fear.

"*Kulluck!* I am thy slave! My words are dull, but it is all true. Am I not here in the dust at thy feet? Do not let anger come. Harken, we thought to ride down this horseman. He turned like a panther. He struck Yussuf such a blow it slit him open.

"Who was I to ride in where Yussuf had fallen? Nay, a thought came to me, and I hastened along the road to the well, calling upon some dog-born Afghans to aid me. I swore that this nameless one had slain the courier and Yussuf also. We gave chase, swift as the black storm wind. At the next station we should have caught him, but he tricked the Tartar guards and went off on a good horse. The officer of the station joined us with ten and two men, after I had sworn to the murder of the courier."

"This nameless one—he had taken the silver tube?" Mir Farash murmured. "And thou, O sharp of wit, thou didst tell the Tartar officer of that also?"

"Nay," exclaimed the tribesman with pride. "I was like a fox in guile. I said only that the *yam* rider had been robbed and his wallet torn open. Those Afghans had seen that. The Tartars could follow the man's trail. After the last light he turned off into the hills, toward Talas. The Tartars were like a dog pack, with their noses to the ground. They made torches and followed slowly. I decided to cast ahead, along the upper trail to Talas. I did not see the thief, but the Hawk House was burning."

Mir Farash nodded reflectively.

"What was he like, this nameless one?"

"A *batyr*—a matchless swordsman—like to no other I have seen." The tribesman gave a shrewd description of Nial, while visibly he pondered something else. "Surely he must come out of the hills upon this river. The Tartars are behind him, and they will not turn back. Give command to hunt for him here."

Again the Persian nodded, impassively.

"I understand. Thou hast failed."

"*Kulluck!* But I alone know his face."

The Kara Kalpak tugged at his beard anxiously.

"Then wait below until I summon thee."

WHEN the tribesman had gone off, grateful to escape punishment for the present, at least, Mir Farash nibbled at one of the sugared fruits. Then without enthusiasm he rose and went up to the roof of his house, where he leaned against the parapet in the full glare of sunlight. Idly he scanned the vistas of alleys below him. Talas sprawled from the river halfway up a stony hill, and his house was one of the highest.

It was a dangerous thing to do; for that was the siesta hour and groups of women were lying under canopies on the flat roofs, where layers of fragrant grapes had been spread to dry. A good Moslem dislikes to be stared at, and will resent violently having his women watched from a roof, no matter how distant. Although Mir Farash's white turban reflected the sunlight, drawing instant attention to him, neither taunts nor arrows came his way. Instead, some of the younger women near him began to chatter in the hope that he would notice them.

But he continued to inspect the narrow valley, the twin slopes of gray stone cut up into terraces heavy with grapevines, the turgid Zarafshan* River, and the empty bridge. The great waterwheel groaned and wheezed. A breath of cooler air from distant heights passed down the valley, mingling with the warm odor of tamarisk, of mulberries ripening in the sun, and the dung and offal of the alleys. Mir Farash called a boy to him and gave command to send watchers to the gates and others to search along the river for a solitary rider—a tall infidel with blue

*The Gold Bringer. In Tamerlane's time gold was washed from its bed.

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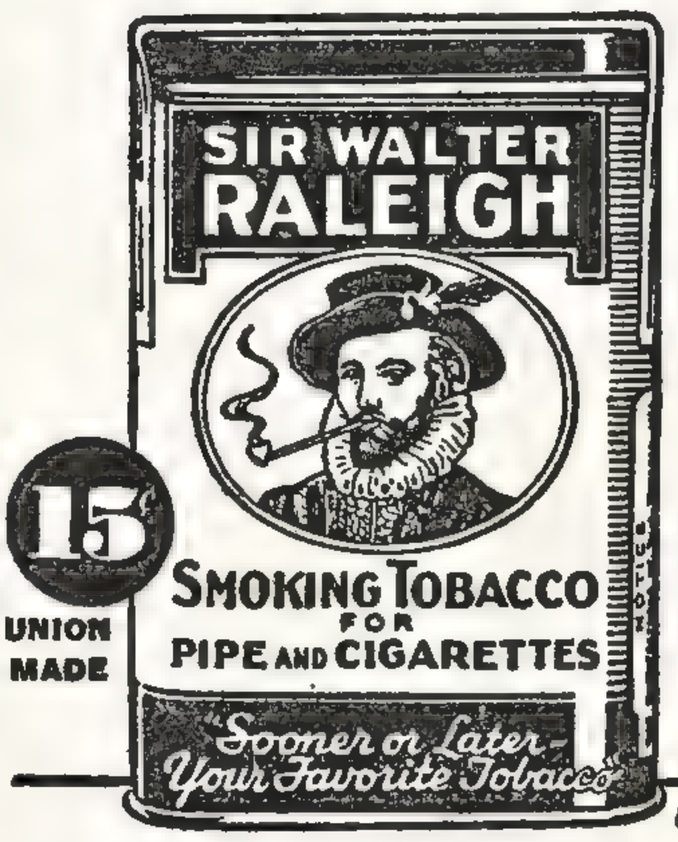

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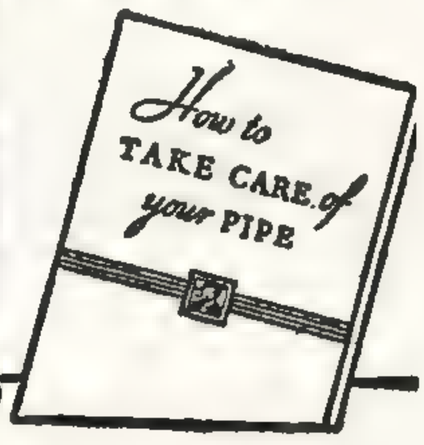


eyes and a lion's mane, who spoke both Arabic and the speech of the Tartars.

By mid-afternoon he had another visitor, a *Kara Kalpak* who was as voiceless as the first had been voluble.

"Neshavan hath found his grave," he reported.

"And where," Mir Farash asked, "is the proof?"

Reaching into a wicker basket beside him, the tribesman lifted out a human head and placed it before the Persian. It had a long black beard, clotted with dried blood.

"The keeper of the hawks," grunted the *Kara Kalpak,* and took a second head from the basket. "Karabek, the archer."

Drawing a sharp knife from his waistband, he slit an ear from each and pouched these two pieces of evidence of the success of his mission before rising silently to depart. Mir Farash smiled fleetingly.

"But what of the girl, Alai?" he questioned.

The *Kara Kalpak* swept his arm outward.

"Gone into the night, like a arrow lost among reeds."

"She will cause trouble. Watch for her and bring her to me. Hast thou seen a tall infidel with blue eyes and a lion's mane? He hath only one straight sword and two saddlebags."

"*Allah tzei!* Yes, we have seen him and his sword. He also escaped because Karabek stood upon their trail with his bow."

"Go thou and search for him. Let no one plunder him, but bring him hither with all he carries."

THE creaking of a far-off waterwheel roused Nial late that afternoon. His first thought was for the saddlebags under his head, and when he had satisfied himself that the silver tube was safe, he looked around for the Tartar girl. She was not in sight, although her pony stood by the piebald horse.

Nial pushed through the poplar grove in which they had taken refuge early that morning, for both were tired and neither wished to ride into Talas in daylight. The girl was sleeping in a hollow, curled up on saddlecloths, her white linen headgear drawn over her face. She did not stir when he stood beside her, nor when he knelt and lifted the white cloth gently.

Her eyes were closed—long eyes that slanted upward a little under heavy lashes darkened with kohl. Her full lips were blood-red against her white face, the face of a weary child. Around her throat curled the mass of her unbound hair, black as night itself. But, seemingly asleep, she was watching him under the veil of her lashes. And when the tall Scot would have gone away, she looked him full in the face, curiously, without a word.

"How do men call thee?" he asked awkwardly.

"Alai."

The girl rose to her knees, brushing back her hair and winding the white coif around it deftly, but without veiling her face. Nial knew that the Tartar girls often went about freely without the heavy veil of the stricter Moslems.

"I have a little food," he ventured. "No water."

From a bag he produced barley cakes and dried curds, arranging them in two equal piles. Alai took up her share and knelt with her back to him, reaching behind her to break the cakes upon the heel of her boot.

"Was Neshavan thy father?" he asked.

"Nay," she murmured, "he nourished me and protected me. He was like a father."

Alai had been left at the Hawk House by her own father, a Tartar *noyon* of the great Horde, who had been fleeing through the hills, closely pursued. He

had been slain, and no one had claimed the girl, who had been raised by the kindly Neshavan.

"Why did the Black Hats seek him out last night? They meant to kill him."

"The dogs!" She lifted her head and spat. "May Allah turn from them. May their days be bitter and fiends trouble their dreams. They are Gutchluk's men."

"Who is he?"

Alai swept her hand toward the hills.

"All this is his. Our falcons brought down some of his messenger pigeons, and Neshavan read the messages, unknowing. We meant no harm."

She pondered a moment and felt in the broad pocket of her *khalat*, offering Nial a handful of sugared ginger. She glanced at him shyly when he took some, then turned her back to nibble at hers. When Neshavan was slain she had stormed and wept, but now it was all over except the hoped-for vengeance; the women of mid-Asia were accustomed to the turns of fate. Alai must have been thirsty, but she did not complain as she curled up by the horses, watching Nial's movements curiously.

Going to the edge of the grove, he looked out over the valley of the Zaraf-shan and the distant roofs of Talas. Several horsemen were passing below him, but no Tartars were visible.

"Soon it will be dark," he said, "and then where will you go—in the town?"

"With you, Lord Nial."

Laughing, he shook his head.

"Nay, Alai, that can not be. I ride far—alone."

"I have kept the saddle for months with Neshavan. I can point out the way to you."

"You must go to your friends."

"I have not one." She shook her head vigorously. "Did you not lift the veil from me? By Allah, have we not shared bread?"

Nial did not try to argue; instead he asked if she knew a house outside the wall where they would be safe for a night. He could leave her where she would be protected.

"We can find Abu Harb," she said after thinking it over. "He hunts antelope and at times steals horses. He owed Neshavan a debt, and so he will give me a saddle. Why do you flee, Lord Nial?"

The Scot had fewer words than this girl, and he could not keep pace with her thoughts.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"*Wallahi*—have you not watched the back track? And where are your goods and servants? You are not a merchant, not a Tartar."

"Nay—" he smiled, the harsh lines softening round his lips—"I am a devil from over the dark water, the sea."

"Then where will you turn your reins?"

"To Cathay."

This silenced Alai only for a moment.

"*Bilmaida*—good! If Allah wills, I may find my own people."

WHEN he saddled the piebald, she had the headstall on the pony and was watching him with amusement as he finished. The sunset glow was fading down the valley when they rode from the grove, Alai leading him along a path beyond sight of the bridge. In the gloom by the river's edge she found a ford, passing through fishermen's huts, up the side of the hill. Casting about in the darkness, she drew near what seemed to be a cleft in a solid cliff.

"*Ai*, Abu Harb," she called softly. "The eagle waits at the hunter's door."

A voice rumbled in the bowels of the hill, and presently a torch flared within the cleft. Without waiting for an invitation, the girl dismounted and led in her pony, while Nial followed more slowly, the piebald objecting savagely to crowding through the rock passages.

Rounding a turn, he found himself in a small cavern with smoke-blackened roof. A one-eyed Arab stared at him suspiciously beneath the torch.

"He is the very one!"

Alai turned as if scenting unseen danger.

"Nay, Abu Harb! He is the Lord Nial who struck a blow for Neshavan, and he hath shared our salt."

At once the Arab lifted his head. His long hair, gray at the temples, was braided close to his skull under the flapping headgear, and his gaunt frame looked like a skeleton draped in rough brown cloth. But he moved swiftly; and Nial, who had been raised among such men, knew that there was strength in the lean arms.

"*Hadd!*" cried the master of the cave. "Be welcome." His eyes opened wide when Nial made answer in sonorous Arabic. "What man art thou, to know the speech of the Nejd! Behold," he added to the girl, "this is the one they seek along the river."

"True, he hath many enemies."

Alai nodded complacently and in the same instant was rocking on her knees, her hair drawn over her face, without a sound. The calamity of last night had struck her afresh.

Abu Harb, who seemed to know how to deal with the grief of women, led her to the rear of the cavern to a rug spread upon a quilt and talked to her, low voiced. Nial noticed that several passages led out of the place and he wan-

dered over to the nearest one, finding it a storage space heaped with hay, antelope horns, odds and ends of saddlery and irons. Before he could look at it more closely, the torch brightened and Abu Harb's lean head was at his shoulder.

"Come, thou," the Arab whispered. "But first, cover thyself with this."

While Nial was putting on the long, light *khufieh*, winding it across his arms and drawing the edge of it over his head, Abu Harb tied the two horses to rings in the far wall and kindled a fire upon the hearth beside the girl.

"We can not talk near her," he explained when they were in the darkness outside. "She understands my speech, and the Iranis—everything. "*Ai-a*, she was a piece of Neshavan's liver, and I—I would lay my one eye at her feet. But now by Allah, Mir Farash is looking for her. How can she hide from him? He will pay gold for her; and the lice of Talas would sell their mothers, if they knew them, for silver. Nay, she must go hence with thee before the next day."

"Nay," the Scot objected. "I go alone.'

"How canst thou? She said she belonged to thee. They will search my house."

"She is not mine."

Stopping in his tracks, the Arab shook his head slowly.

"Khawand Nial, I do not understand. Of what use are words? She is a breath from Peristan, and all men look after her. If she wishes to go with thee, she will go. By Allah, I will go also. Come, we will need many things."

With long strides the hunter was off toward the distant lights of the town. But when Nial caught up with him he stopped to whisper fiercely.

"What good comes from sitting in one place? These dogs in stinking sheepskins offend my nostrils. *Wallahi*, they slew Neshavan, my companion of the road. Am I to sit in peace with them? I will show thee a new road to Samarkand where the horse herds and the antelope run. But we will need barley, dried meat, garlic, a soft blanket for Alai, a packhorse."

Muttering to himself, Abu Harb checked off necessities on his long fingers as he steered Nial toward an open gate in the wall. He had no hesitation and seemed to expect Nial to take care of himself. Dogs rushed out to snarl at them, and drew off before the sweep of the Arab's long stick. Then both men halted to stare ahead of them.

THERE were lights in the open square at the head of the alley, and a group of the *Kara Kalpaks* stood their ground like jackals facing wolves. Three horsemen rode toward them, three Tartars with an officer in the lead. Nial recognized the *darogha* of the post station who had questioned him.

As the Tartars came on, the tribesmen fingered their weapons and one spat noisily. The *darogha* glanced at him and loosened the coil of rope that hung at his saddlehorn. The Black Hat knew the meaning of this, because he drew back reluctantly when the horse's muzzle was almost touching him. The tribesmen went off, as if at a signal, and at a word from the officer the two Tartar warriors followed them.

Abu Harb chuckled silently, but Nial watched the officer who remained at the alley mouth, rubbing his arms as if they were stiffened by long riding. Presently, hearing the drip of water from a dark court off the alley, the *darogha* let his horse wander toward it, and Nial heard him dismount.

"A knife—swiftly," he whispered to the Arab.

Abu Harb asked no questions. He thrust the bone hilt of a curved knife into the Scot's hand and nodded eagerly when Nial bade him follow but not in-

terfere in anything that happened. Only when Nial turned toward the court did the Arab pluck his sleeve.

"Nay," Abu Harb breathed. "That is one of the khan's men. A panther is easier to stalk."

"Hold thy tongue."

Thrusting back the Arab, Nial went on, making no effort to walk quietly. He stepped into the yard, paused to stare in the faint starlight at the horse, and moved to the well. The Mongol, who had finished drinking, looked toward him casually and jerked the horse's head back from the water. As he did so, Nial's left hand closed upon his right wrist, and when he turned angrily he felt the tip of a sharp steel blade press through the coat beneath his ribs.

"Be silent!" Nial whispered. "It is for me to speak, for thee to listen."

"*Kai,*" the man grunted softly, "thou art the slayer of the *yam.*"

"True. But I am here to tell thee more that is true. The man I slew was the robber, the *Kara Kalpak.*"

And in brief words Nial related how he had come upon the dead courier. The Mongol listened intently, showing no excitement except that he breathed swifter than usual. His quick eyes had sighted Abu Harb standing within hearing, and the iron grasp on his right wrist did not relax. Nial knew that the officer would have his sword slung upon his back with the hilt over his left shoulder where it could not be reached with the left hand.

"I hear," the *darogha* responded calmly. "Perhaps it is true. What would you have me do?"

"Go back to Samarkand. Report what I have said and question the one who lied again."

"He hath gone, like a stone dropped into deep water. Hast thou the message tube?"

Nial thought for a space, conscious of Abu Harb breathing heavily behind him.

"Aye so. If thou wilt cease pursuit I will bring it untouched to a station."

"Nay, an order was given to pursue thee, and caught thou wilt be. If I fail, others will come, unerring as the birds that see in the night."

This Nial knew to be true. If a general order had gone out to find him, the Tartar cavalry would be loosed from the nearest camps to bring him in.

"What was in the tube?" he asked.

"We have not been told. But it is from the hand of Barka Khan to the feet of the great Kublai Khan, Lord of the East."

Nial silently cursed the silver tube, for other hands than the Tartars' would be stretched out for a missive of the great khan. Suddenly he dropped the officer's wrist and reached up, drawing the other's short saber from its sheath. This he tossed into the well, and backed a step to feel for the horse's rein.

"Do not take the horse," whispered the officer quickly. "*Kai,* I am no speaker of vain words. I will not move from this place nor follow thee for the time milk takes to boil."

A hoarse cluck of warning sounded behind Nial, who pondered. He could not keep the beast. It would be recognized by these Tartars as far as they could see.

"What is thy name, thy rank?" he asked.

"Chagan, *ung-khan* of the Almalyk regiment."

"Then keep to thy word, Chagan!"

TURNING and calling to Abu Harb, Nial ran from the courtyard and across the alley into the mouth of another lane. Before they could turn a corner, they heard the snap and hiss of arrows shot after them. The shafts crashed against unseen walls, and Nial laughed under his breath. Chagan had carried out his pledge after his own fashion. He made no attempt to follow them, and the Arab doubled back

to the gate, racing ahead until Nial could make out the loom of the cliff.

"Surely Allah hath afflicted thee with madness," panted Abu Harb. "Even the birds and wolves flee before those Tartar riders. And thou hast stolen from their great khan. What is in the tube?" When he received no answer, he sucked in his breath admiringly. "Eh, eh, thou art a very father of strife. By Allah, I will surely go with thee."

He held out his hand eagerly.

"Hast thou gold? I must buy what is needed in the bazaar. Soon we may be in our shrouds, thou and I, but first we must eat."

He took the gold Nial held out to him as a matter of course, and strode off with the air of a man of affairs who has much to do in little time. With difficulty — for the rock was honeycombed with fissures—Nial found the entrance to the cave, guiding himself by the smell of smoke and the drowsy stamping of the horses.

Alai greeted him with silent satisfaction, showing no trace of the grief of an hour before. Moving over to the edge of the carpet, she made place for him by the fire and curled herself up comfortably.

Half hidden in shadow, her eyes were dark as the night itself. Within them danced two pinpoints of light, reflected from the glowing embers of the fire. It was Nial who first looked away, into the fire, wondering if she had a power of witchery in her. A woman of Christendom would have plied him with questions or complained of hunger. But this Tartar girl was as untamed and as unknowable as a young animal. And he did not want to bid her farewell.

"Abu Harb says," he ventured, "that there is danger here for you. I also must ride hence without stopping for thorns or stones. So Abu Harb will take you to Samarkand, toward the setting sun, while I go on to the rising sun."

He thought she would exclaim or protest. Instead she seemed to ponder his words gravely.

"Once," she observed, "I went to Samarkand and the men there followed me about. Now that I am alone they would take me and sell me as a slave. I will not be a slave."

"But where I go the Tartar horsemen will follow."

"Allah sends evil with good. This is my country. In the hills are many safe places good for hiding. Abu Harb knows them. And I will not leave my hills."

When Abu Harb returned, leading a packhorse laden with purchases, he spoke briefly with Alai and confided to Nial that he was quite willing to set out to the east, up the Zarafshan. It appeared that certain owners of herds in Samarkand had set a price on his head. He was full of zeal to depart without a moment's delay, explaining that Chagan had ridden off toward Samarkand and that the night in general was full of calamity.

Nothing, however, hindered them as they left Talas behind and rode along a deserted trail by the river until the rising sun gleamed in their faces.

Abu Harb was in the lead, tugging the pack animal after him, until he halted to let Nial come up. Something seemed to amuse him, and he pointed behind them.

"Look!"

All Nial saw was the girl, who had slipped back behind the saddle, and was leaning on a blanket pack tied to the horn, her head on her arms, sleeping quietly.

"Didst thou not swear, Lord Nial, to ride hither alone? And look." The Arab smiled reminiscently. "She will go where she will. Is she not rightly named the eagle? She seeks the high and distant places, taking no thought of danger. By Allah, thou canst train the young hawk and the leopard to hand, but not the eagle."

CHAPTER III

ROAD TO CATHAY

LATE that afternoon they halted in a cross gully where some grass clung to the edge of a dry stream and creeping mimosa offered fuel for a fire. The gray Zaraphan had grown more noisy as they ascended, and the ravine had narrowed to a gorge where the rubble of the steep slopes lay almost at the river's bank. Abu Harb was careful to build the fire where it could not be seen from the trail below.

"At all times," he explained, "riders come down from the Gate. They would not draw rein for me, but they would dismount to plunder thee and this girl."

The fire had died away and they had finished eating the chicken and rice that Alai boiled for them, when the beat of a horse's hoofs echoed down the gorge, drawing nearer. Loose stones began to clatter and roll, and the rider swept past unseeing and unseen, as if reckless of anything but time. The Arab, who had hastened to the horses' heads, went down to stare after him.

"There is smoke far below," he announced, returning to crouch on his blanket by the Scot. "God alone knows what has happened. It is well that we are here and not down there. What is that?"

Nial had taken the message tube from the saddelbag and was inspecting it again in the last of the daylight—knowing that Abu Harb would be eaten with curiosity concerning it, and would probably pilfer it to examine the thing unless his curiosity were satisfied.

"The post to Kublai Khan," he said. "Do not touch the seal."

The Arab had stolen more than horses in his time, but he held it gingerly in his scarred fingers, shaking his head in amazement. Carefully he shook it close to his ear, sniffed at it and weighed it thoughtfully.

"*Má uzbillah!*" he exclaimed. "May God protect us! What a thing to have. Wilt thou not open it?"

"Nay, I shall give it back as it is."

"But it is too heavy for a writing. It does not smell of musk or sweet scent. It may have emeralds within, or the precious stones from the throne seat of a shah. Or perhaps some rare carved jade which the Tartars cherish. We could not keep such things, but I could sell them."

"Give it back!" cried the girl suddenly.

All the Arab's instincts rebelled at this.

"Only a fool casts away treasure," he growled. "With this Lord Nial can bargain for his life."

"Thou art a blind mole, feeling only the earth under thee!" she scolded him. "*Kai*, why did the Black Hats slay a courier to get this one thing? Why do the khan's horsemen keep the saddle without sleeping to find it again? Death awaits the holder. And thy greed would take it into a bazaar."

"Eh, eh, I did but think of its value. Is it not Lord Nial's?" He handed the tube back to the Scot, who did not smile at his sudden zeal to be rid of it.

"Thou art leading us, Abu Harb," he observed, "to a safe place of hiding. But here I see only the bare gorge. Where is thy place?"

Tracing in the sand between his knees, the Arab explained. For seven days' ride the Zarafshan wound up toward the heights, ending finally in what he called a wall of ice. It was old ice that never melted, although at times it moved.* Not quite halfway up the valley there was a trail leading to a nest of small valleys, where good grass, cold water and game could be found. Abu Harb had spent more than one summer there hunting.

*The same glacier is still at the head of the Zarafshan.

"Perhaps in three days, perhaps in four we will set our feet on the trail," he calculated. "I think that Tartars will follow us up the river, but first that amir, Chagan, will muster fresh riders from Samarkand. By Allah, the Tartars will never come up this valley with less than a regiment. They will not overtake us."

Nial wondered why the men of the Horde, who seemed to have no fear of anything, should wait for a thousand sabers before entering this deserted gorge; and he remembered Neshavan's warning at the Hawk House.

"Aye, so. Yet, Abu Harb, this road comes not to an end at the ice. Surely it goes on to the East, for caravans once passed over it."

"Who knows where it goes? By the blood of Ali, I have not seen the man who knows."

Neshavan had said that wanderers had turned back from fear. Nial knew that both Tartars and Moslems dreaded the high passes, saying that the spirits of the upper air were encountered there, meaning that cold and storms made such passes hazardous.

"If there is a road," he pointed out, "we could follow it."

This time Abu Harb shook his head and laughed good-naturedly.

"Besides the ice stands the Gate," he vouchsafed. "Within it is the breeding ground of the *Kara Kalpaks,* their city. They are vultures, feeding on the dead, but they are watched over by Gutchluk Khan."

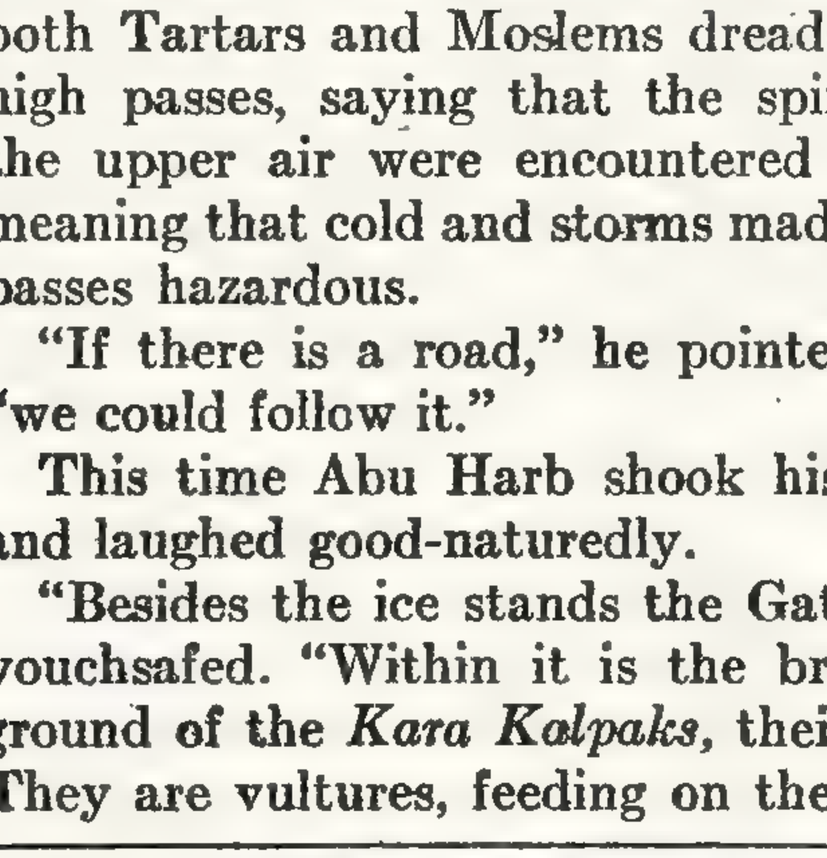
"The Wizard King," Nial translated the name into Arabic. "What is he?"

"What is the voice of the wind? What is the sound of the storm? I have heard his call, but of him I know only that he is an *ifrit.* He is a devil, hiding himself on the height."

"*Yah ahmak,*" cried Alai impatiently. "O witless! Would a devil send written missives upon a pigeon, or send his men to slay Neshavan? Gutchluk Khan is a man who hides from sight. Because he is hidden and feared, the cities pay him a tribute, also the caravan merchants. They lie who say otherwise."

"*Shway, shway,*" murmured the hunter. "Softly, softly, little Alai. I have seen Gutchluk in the shape of a white vulture who settled down beside me and spoke."

During his summer in the upper valleys near the Gate Abu Harb had tried to cut out horses from the Kara Kalpak herd until the day when, watching from a rocky ravine, he had seen a white vulture circling over him, and descending upon the bones of a *markhor* not a lance toss away. Instead of plucking at the bones, the great bird had sat motionless, its red eyes upon him, and a voice had come from it cursing him by the blood of Kerbala; and Abu Harb had fled without looking behind him to his horse. No other man had been in the ravine.



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FIT GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

"Thy fear!" Alai mocked him, chin on hand. "Other fools tell other tales of how Gutchluk spoke to them from the face of a cliff where nothing could be. Aye, and how he hath a trumpet that resounds down the valley a day's ride. I tell thee the truth, that he hath gained power over the *Kara Kalpaks*, until they serve him like slaves and spread the fear of his name with their swords."

Considering this, Abu Harb grunted.

"A man, perhaps, he may be. But then he hath devils to serve him. And I would be worse than a fool thou hast named me if I drew my reins within the Gate."

Still muttering, he went off to seek his blankets. Alai chuckled to herself as she settled down to sleep near Nial, but presently she raised herself on her elbow.

"Lord Nial," she whispered, "wilt thou go with Abu Harb or try to follow the road through the Gate?"

"Only God knows," the Scot answered frankly.

"In your land, the place you come from, do the women wear veils and chew mastic?"

"Nay, *kuchik khanim*."

"Lord Nial, I am not a little woman, I am a strong girl. *Wallahi*, have I braided up my hair as the women of any man? Do the girls of your land take off their boots when they go into the tents at night?"

"They take off everything when they sleep at night, and they keep very quiet, like young antelope."

For awhile Alai considered this, her eyes dim in the twilight.

"Still," she ventured, "when the *buran* blows cold, as it does here from the snow, they would not take off everything?"

"Certainly not," he assured her. "But they would keep quiet."

He was half alseep, after the hard riding of the last three days, while the Tartar girl had managed to doze in the saddle. He heard her whisper to herself, and was conscious of the faint scent of dried roses. Abu Harb had volunteered to keep guard down by the trail, and Nial dropped off to sleep without misgivings.

When he roused and glanced about before sunrise, he saw the Arab sitting up in his ragged blanket and scratching his head, where Alai had been.

"Only God knows," exclaimed Abu Harb, "what is in the mind of a woman. She came down in anger a little after starlight and took my place. But I was glad to sleep."

IT WAS Alai who discovered the riders on the trail behind them, early in the afternoon of the fourth day. The two men had noticed nothing; even the Scot's keen sight could not penetrate the sun's glare reflected from the bed of the valley. But after long scrutiny Abu Harb admitted that the girl was right.

"The vultures," he explained. "They rise and follow after something. Nay, it is not cattle going at such a pace."

And he searched the ground ahead of them with an anxious frown.

They had penetrated to the upper reaches of the Zarafshan, where the valley walls stood back from the river and the trail ran along the gravel bed, circling round buttresses of red clay cut by centuries of erosion into the shape of gigantic lions' paws. The scent of juniper and stunted sage clung to the hollows, but when they topped a rise they were buffeted by the icy wind from the heights. Above the bare red walls of the valley loomed peak upon peak, carpeted with fresh green that gave way to bare black basalt, which in turn was covered by white snow caps. "The White Ones," Abu Harb had said when the summits first came into sight.

Here was silence, except for the swift rush of water over the stones. The song birds had left the air to the vultures, and black eagles began to appear. The valley had grown vast, but now it was dwarfed

by the huge ranges above it. Nial felt that he was approaching the ramparts of space itself.

Only once had he caught a glimpse of the gut in this barrier. Before the last sunset Abu Harb had shown him a distant break in the mountain barrier. At either side of the gut rose two stone pinnacles, blood colored against the black rock behind them. They looked tiny at that distance, but Nial knew they were high. They might have been the sacrifice stones of vanished giants.

"The Pillars of Silence," the Arab had said simply.

Now he quested along the river like a dog on a scent until he found a brush-filled ravine up which the horses could force their way. Nial and the girl dismounted, scrambling over loose rocks until they halted in a small clearing hidden from the trail beneath.

"Now," Abu Harb explained, "we will see who comes after. *Ma'uzbillah!*"

Open mouthed, he stared beyond them, his face suddenly gray with fear. Glancing over his shoulder, Nial saw a brush covered slope and what looked like a rude hut. Stones had been piled together and roofed over with poplar poles, with horns of antelope and mountain sheep fastened on the ends. Weather-gray poles leaned about it crazily, and rags moved drowsily in the wind. On the highest pair of antelope horns perched a great white vulture.

"Like to that one was Gutchluk!" Abu Harb whispered. "Look, it awaits us upon a shrine, a grave."

He listened anxiously but the vulture did not speak, and when Nial tossed a stone toward the shrine it flapped away clumsily.

"Evil power is here," the Arab insisted, "and now it is too late to go back to the trail. Go thou and watch from those rocks."

With a nod the Scot climbed past the shrine up a chute of broken rock to a pinnacle where, lying down and edging forward between two boulders, he could see the trail, but could see nothing of the clearing where Abu Harb and the girl were tethering the horses. It was some time before he made out horsemen coming around a bend in the river trail, and longer before he recognized them as *Kara Kalpaks*, fully armed.

Alai came up to the lookout and crouched beside him, without excitement.

"Many of those dogs come and go," she whispered. "Why should they follow us?" Then she added thoughtfully, "Soon we will be where the roads cross. Promise me now that you will come with the hunter to his hiding place in the valley."

Still intent on the groups of riders below, Nial answered absently:

"How can I promise, little Alai? Have I not said that I mean to follow the road to the East?"

"Fool! Have you a token from Gutchluk to open the way?"

Her eyes were angry, her white teeth showing between her parted lips, her small hands clenched on her knees. Her white, intent face had lost its boyish playfulness; she turned to him wistfully, confidingly.

"Have you not said," he responded, "this Gutchluk Khan is a man, not a magician? Why should I fear him more than the Tartars?"

"Because he is truly a khan, who rules men. I have spoken with one who saw him, sitting alone upon a black stone with an unchained eagle beside him and a panther asleep at his feet. He seemed to be asleep, but suddenly he whispered and the panther rose and snarled, and this man fled away for his life. You are like a lion cub, being stubborn and stupid, and Gutchluk will be amused when you stand bound before him. When I watched the herds for Neshavan, I often thought that I would go and sit at the feet of this man whose power is a thunderbolt, who is feared by the Tartar Horde. Perhaps I shall go."

Chin on hand, she glanced at him

from the corners of her eyes, half smiling. She was lovely as an elf maid, and quite conscious of it. Nial turned abruptly and kissed her lips.

"What is that for?" she asked, surprised. No one had ever caressed her in that fashion.

"Thou art beautiful, little Alai, and I—" He bit his lip fiercely. "Go thou with Abu Harb, to safety."

The girl's hand was on his shoulder when she thrust him away and sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing.

"Thou! Thou art an ox with grass between thy teeth! A blind ox, with head hanging. And I thought thee a lion among men, since the night thou sought me in the dark. Nay, I go to seek Gutchluk in his aerie."

She ran down the pinnacle, springing from rock to rock, turning once to laugh at him.

"And if thou wilt see me, I shall be sitting at his feet, telling him the tale of thy folly to beguile him."

WITH that she was gone, and when Nial stirred to follow her he remembered the men on the trail below. A group of the *Kara Kalpaks* was outlined against the yellow gravel, their heads lifted curiously. Several of them pointed to the sky above him. Turning cautiously, Nial saw the white vulture moving in lazy circles over the pinnacle.

But the riders did not dismount. In spite of their wounds—many had bandaged faces and bound arms—they whipped on their stumbling ponies. Others came by, hurrying on foot, their horses burdened with heavy bales which might have been loot or possessions—it was all the same in these hills. Presently Abu Harb crept up beside him and grunted with interest.

"Allah hath caused fighting down the valley, yet these do not bear themselves like victors. They go too fast."

More of them appeared with mules and even a burdened Bactrian camel, led by women who plodded listlessly along. It was an hour before the trail was emptied of its human tide.

"Where is Alai?" Nial whispered.

"With the horses—praying at the shrine. She bade me come hither, saying thou wert useless as a child unweaned. Truly that vulture was an omen of evil, for now these dogs are ahead of us."

Restlessly the old Arab slid back and retraced his steps to the shrine, followed by Nial, who wondered what Alai might be up to. She was not in the clearing, and they dared not call to her. Abu Harb prowled about uneasily and came to a stop before the horses.

"*Wallahi,* her pony is gone, Lord Nial." He hastened to inspect the pile of packs by the brush. "Yet she hath taken nothing else that was hers. What more is to come upon our heads?"

"Look at the ground," Nial whispered. "Nay, over there by the sand under the rocks."

Alai and he wore softened horsehide boots with heels that left a clear imprint, while the sand revealed the tracks of bare feet moving about haphazardly. He was certain those footprints had not been there when he left the clearing. Abu Harb clucked gloomily and muttered the name of Gutchluk.

"Salaam, O my companions of the road!" a strange voice saluted them. "I have looked for ye very patiently."

It was a courteous, amused voice, and it belonged to a slender young Persian with an immaculate white turban, who was making his way up through the brush. Abu Harb eyed him as a dog eyes an innocent-appearing leopard.

"Mir Farash," he ejaculated.

"Verily thou knowest the interpreter of dreams of Talas." The Persian stared curiously at Nial. "My ears have heard much talk of this noble *feringi,* and my heart rejoices at this unlooked-for meeting. That wild girl, Alai, sought me upon

the road below and said that he was waiting here in the brush."

"By Allah, that is a lie!" stormed the Arab. "Thou art Gutchluk's man, and he sent thee."

The good nature did not fade from Mir Farash's opium-shadowed eyes, although he glanced once over his shoulder at the dozen tribesmen who made their way after him up the slope, fingering their weapons. Nial moved over to the packs, standing between them and the steep bank.

"Now—" Mir Farash smiled upon him —"we are all friends together, and surely thy troubles are past, since I have come to lead thee out of the abyss of peril to the height of safety."

The Persian's lilting cadence was barely intelligible to the Scot, but Abu Harb accepted him as the messenger of inevitable disaster. He looked once at the bows the *Kara Kalpaks* carried ready strung, and squatted down indifferently to listen to what might be said.

"What seekest thou, O servant of Gutchluk?"

"No more than a gift, a useless little thing from this *feringi*. He carries a missive to Kublai Khan, and now thy servant will relieve him of its care."

There was no chance of flight. Even if Nial could have caught up his saddlebags and escaped the arrows of the tribesmen, he would not have been able to outrun mounted men. So, without moving, he nodded at the Persian.

"I have no gift for thee. Take what thou wilt."

Smiling, Mir Farash shook his head.

"By the beard and the breath of Ali, am I a thief? Are we not friends?" But he crouched like a hungry jackal over the packs, loosening the thongs swiftly from Nial's saddlebags and dumping the contents on the ground.

"Nay," muttered Abu Harb, "thou art the father of all thieves. If thou wert minded to give even a bone to a dog, thou wouldst first break out the marrow."

Astonished, he fell silent. In all Nial's scattered kit there was no sign of the worn silver tube with the red seal. Intently he watched while Mir Farash ran his fingers through the Scot's garments without result except to uncover a sack of gold coins. Then the Persian searched Abu Harb himself thoroughly, despite the old hunter's comments upon the ways of human insects.

But Mir Farash still smiled.

"Harken, Lord Nial, to thy peril. After ye three rode from Talas, that uncircumcised Tartar, Chagan, summoned other riders of the Horde from the Samarkand road. They cut their way through the *Kara Kalpaks* who stood against them, and when I set the foot of discretion in the saddle of preservation, they were within sight of Talas. Long since they have discovered the path of thy flight, for watchers on the river saw thee pass. A man of mine, who rode up without sleep or rest, said that they were pushing up the river.

"If thou art taken, they will not wait a minute before lifting the skin from thee slowly, beginning at the feet, until thou art minded to give up to them what they seek. We are making haste toward the Gate. Even those infidel Tartars can not force the Gate, and safety awaits thee, if thou wilt yield me the missive to the great khan. Is it not a fair payment? Within the Gate thou art free to go where thou wilt."

He waited a moment to let Nial ponder.

"Where hast thou hidden that which was in the silver tube?"

Nial laughed.

"I have hidden naught, and the tube is gone."

Suspiciously Mir Farash savored his words.

"What was within it?"

"I know not."

"Now verily am I a blind ox to be led by the nose?" He spat out red betel pulp and turned to his men. "Search this place and bring hither their saddles."

He was careful to leave warriors with bows to watch his prisoners while he searched all the packs anew. At the end of an hour he had found nothing except some carefully hidden trinkets which Abu Harb had not seen fit to reveal to his companions. His brow black with fury, Mir Farash struck his hands together to summon his men.

"To the Gate!" And to Nial he cried, "Better for thee to have spoken here than to go to the one who awaits thee."

FOR two days Mir Farash and his cavalcade pushed along a trail that was a path through a nightmare. Ascending from the river, it climbed the slope of yellow conglomerate until it crawled upon the face of solid basalt. The wind gusts swept the weary beasts from their footing.

More men and camels pressed up from behind, and a rumor ran through the tide of fugitives that the Tartars were cutting down the hindmost. At night—for even the hillmen could not travel that trail in the dark—the red eyes of fires and the tossing specks of torches outlined the way behind them. High pitched shouts, tossed from fire to fire, echoed back from unseen cliffs. A half moon stared down from the rim of the valley upon restless, loaded camels tied to outcropping rocks, and knots of men sleeping where they could find shelter from the wind's blast.

It was after the third sunrise that Nial heard a reverberation in the air, faintly at first. Then it swelled to a metallic roar which beat back from the opposite cliff and dwindled away down the valley, as if mounted trumpeters had galloped at lightning speed over their heads.

"Gutchluk's horns," Abu Harb whispered.

Although Nial peered ahead, he could see no habitation of any kind, or any human above them on the mountain. A veil of mist hung about the peaks, forcing the eagles to fly low. Thousands of feet below them the gray Zarafshan twisted through its bare bed between the red lion's paws that looked diminutive from the heights. Abu Harb contemplated it listlessly.

"Before the sun is high, we will see the Gate," he observed, and added moodily that it was easier to pass through it once than twice.

The old Arab had sworn every day by all the ninety and nine holy names of Allah that he had not taken the silver tube from Nial's bag and he did not cease speculating as to what had happened to it. Nial only knew that it had been safe that morning when they had broken camp, and he wondered what Alai would say when she knew of its loss. Although he watched for her—and Mir Farash's stout horses and quick tempered escort forced a way with knees and feet through the fugitives on the trail—he saw nothing of the Tartar girl.

When the mist cleared ahead of them, Arab Harb nudged him and pointed. The Zarafshan ended in a deep pool, and beyond the pool rose the ghost of a river, gray and motionless between the shoulders of two mountains. Over the summit of the gray ice gleamed the pure white of distant snow.

"Not that," said the Arab, "it is here, the *Jissn al-Hadid.*"

Beside them stood the mighty pedestals of the twin rock towers, rising from the lower valley, looking from the trail like pyramids. Between these pillars in steep traverses, more than once crossing a rude bridge of tree trunks and stones, the trail ascended to the gut of the pass.

The *Kara Kalpaks* who escorted them paid no more attention to the mighty gateway than to the rubbish lying beside the road. But even they dismounted to pass over some of the bridges that led

across narrow chasms. And once, looking down, Nial saw the bare bones of a horse and man stretched on the rocks.

They climbed steadily, for Mir Farash had gone on ahead, and the tribesmen had orders to make haste. Above them the gate itself began to take shape—roughly cut limestone blocks fitted together into a wall. Above the wall shaggy heads peered down at them; and once a tribesman near Nial howled up at them like a wolf until the alert echoes yelped back like fleeing jackals. More heads appeared; and when they stood at last, breathing heavily, a mocking clamor greeted them.

"*Ai,* the antelope have been driven from the plain! They come panting with ropes on their necks."

"*Wallah!,* O brothers, open to the amir of the infidels!"

"Nay, his woman was more of a man."

But the Kara Kalpak shouted impatiently, and the dark gate swung back. It was of massive teak, cracked with age and bound by bronze wrought into the shape of flying birds. Nial was thrust through by the tribesmen, who beat back the guardians of the wall until a fight seemed in the making. Abu Harb, who had used his tongue to return abuse for insult, was borne along.

"May dogs litter on your graves," he yelped. "May God preserve me from the contamination of your touch, and assuage my nostrils from this stench that is worse than the stench of camels rolling in dry mud. What hath befallen your noses, that they are slit? Now I know why the women of this place of abomination have no noses."

Stones flew at him, and the hillmen rushed with drawn knives, while the *Kara Kalpaks* held them off with sword and shield and Abu Harb's shout rose to a crescendo.

"Spawn of a dunghill! Is this the city of goat tenders—the abode of those who have left shame behind them?"

But presently even Abu Harb drew a breath of silent amazement, and the *Kara Kalpaks* looked ahead with interest. They had come to the far end of the gut, where they could see out upon the eastern side of the range. Accustomed to the desolation of the upper Zarafshan, they beheld now the very opposite. A circular valley lay some three thousand feet below them, surrounded by the familiar red mountain slopes, rising terrace upon terrace, darkened by pine growth.

But the valley itself gleamed pure green except where the water of a lake reflected the blue sky. Wind ripples passed over the tall grass and wheat fields, divided by tiny streams and clusters of fruit trees. But the round domes of tents and the square roofs of tiny stone huts marked a city of some size.

"Eh," breathed Abu Harb, with a desert man's appreciation of flowing water, "an oasis on the veritable top of the world!"

"Nay," grunted one of the *Kara Kalpaks,* "Paldorak, our city, where thou wilt dwell for perhaps one dawn and darkness again before thy grave is dug yonder."

He curved a scarred finger toward the center of the valley, above the lake and the roofs of Paldorak. Here rose a single height of red rock, so serrated by erro-sion on the summit that it might have been a ruined citadel built by men of another age.

"The house," the tribesman vouch-safed, "of Gutchluk Khan. It is empty."

"And where it he?" Abu Harb glanced up involuntarily.

The only answer was the wave of a long sleeved arm across the valley and the sky.

As he descended the road Nial noticed that two other passes cut the circle of mountains about the flat basin of Pal-dorak. The one to the north seemed to be a gorge that might lead anywhere or nowhere. But to the east a narrow valley opened up, and beyond it showed the white summits of distant mountains. He wondered if this were the caravan road to Cathay that had been closed by Gutchluk's will.

He wondered more when they rode through the alleys of Paldorak. The place was a labyrinth of dwellings built of stone so old and worn that it was black and smooth to the touch. From the open doorways came a stench that made him choke. Even the dogs that nosed the offal in the alley dirt knew him for a stranger and snarled at his passing. Bald vultures squatted on projecting roofbeams. Men sprawled in sleep under-foot, with their arms thrown over rag bundles. Felt tents covered every vacant space, and ponies that bore signs of desperate riding were tethered wherever the streams of human beings gave them space.

Paldorak had become a rendezvous for the lawless. Gaunt Turkomans sat with their heads together, turning to curse in unison at sheepskin-clad hillmen; a man with a shaven head and a robe of cloth of gold over his rags sold swallows from a skin of reeking arak to a mullah who carried a sheathed sword in his hand. Behind other men walked veiled women, staggering under bundles, heedless of the taunts of the bare-faced, painted women who loitered by the gate of the bazaar.

They all stared with avid curiosity at the tall youth with the yellow mane of hair, who rode unarmed, for the *Kara Kalpaks* had taken their weapons from the two captives.

Abu Harb listened in vain for any chant of prayer, and shook his head vir-tuously.

" 'Tis without faith, this place," he an-nounced. "By Allah, it is a veritable breeding place of evil."

Nial did not smile. The old Arab was no strict servant of Islam, but he made shift to mutter the five prayers between sunrise and full dark.

But when they stopped in the near darkness of the covered bazaar, and Abu Harb dismounted, placing his ragged prayer rug on the least filthy part of the alley, four of the *Kara Kalpaks* fell upon him without warning. While one held his feet and two others forced his arms be-hind his back, the fourth lashed tight his wrists and elbows.

Nial was down from the saddle with-out an instant's delay to go to his aid, but one of the tribesmen spurred for-ward and checked him with a drawn sword—his own blade which had been taken from him in the valley of the Zarafshan.

"Thy time is not yet," the swordsman assured him.

The four led Abu Harb away on foot, holding to the end of the rope that bound him. Over his shoulder the old Arab called back to his friend:

"Seek for Alai. By Mir Farash she will be. Think not that she betrayed us to these sons of jackals. May Allah watch over her!"

The throng in the bazaar only glanced casually at the struggle and resumed their haggling. A boy snatched up Abu

Harb's carpet and darted off with it as the *Kara Kalpak* led Nial through an archway to a door that was opened grudgingly to their pounding.

"Here is thy house," said their leader, yawning, "where Mir Farash will look to thee."

CHAPTER IV

THE TASTE OF STEEL

THE dwelling of Mir Farash, like most of those in Paldorak, had one fortified gate and several secret runways; it had cellars that opened upon the bazaar, and a square tower from which the height of red rock could be seen. It had curtained alcoves for opium smokers, and a space barred by iron grilles through which veiled women peered indolently.

But Alai had been placed in a silent and embrasureless cell, and left to her own devices. The hag who came to summon her after moonrise found her apparently asleep on the carpet, but in reality keenly awake to every sound in this house which had become her prison.

"One hath sent for you, *kuchik khanum*," the hag explained indifferently. "Rise and follow."

She led the Tartar girl down a vacant stair to the street, where Alai veiled herself with her white headcloth, noticing as she did so that two armed men fell in behind them. The few tribesmen who met them seemed to know the hag, for the kept their distance from the girl. The way led up steadily, until the last roofs fell behind them and a clear moon shone down upon a bare rock slope.

Following what looked like a goat path, the hag climbed steadily until they entered the shadow of a wall, above which the jagged line of ruined towers stood against the sky. Alai had satisfied herself that the two guards waited at the edge of the houses below, and thus flight down the slope would be useless. In any case she could not escape from Paldorak or the valley.

"Go in," said the hag without emotion.

"Why?" Alai objected. "To what?"

"To listen to the voice of Gutchluk Khan."

The hag sat down on the rubble of a ruined gateway with the air of one who may have the night to wait. Alai hesitated only a minute before climbing into the ruins, outwardly confident enough in her slender *khalat* and small boots, but inwardly much afraid. Even Paldorak was less ominous than this deserted domain of a wizard.

Some distance ahead a lantern rested on the ground. When she was about to take it up, the shrunken figure of a man appeared beside her and picked up the light. He moved with a curious shuffling step, and in a moment she discovered that he was blind. He must have known every foot of the height, to lead the way as he did, down one lane between broken rock walls into another.

The Tartar girl had a keen sense of direction and she was aware that the blind lanternbearer doubled on his path, making circles through the labyrinth, until he came to a square pool coated with green scum. Tamarisk and creepers grew out of the crevices above the stagnant water and, as the guide made his way slowly along the edge, a sluggish snake slid from beneath his feet into the water.

To comfort herself, Alai sang under her breath a song of the sheepherders, to ward off evil spirits:

> "*Ai-a-a*, come away brothers,
> "With me. *Ai-a-a* . . ."

Turning his wrinkled head, the man snarled at her voicelessly and beckoned her under an archway. Descending some steps that had been cleared of débris, he came out into what looked like an open court. Grass grew in the cracks of the

flagging, and some effort had been made to repair the walls, which were too high to climb.

Taking his lantern, the blind guide retraced his steps, and Alai heard a wooden door rasp shut. For a moment she thought she was alone in the court; then in the far end, flooded by moonlight, she saw a man standing with outstretched arms. Except for his head, which turned restlessly, he made no movement. Alai made out that he was bound on a stake, his arms fastened to the crosspiece.

And he was Abu Harb, except for his head which resembled a black panther's. Slowly the girl advanced into the moonlight, and the head turned toward her without a sound. Black hair hung about it, and white fangs gleamed in the mouth aperture.

And out of the mouth came an unknown voice.

"Thou art the daughter of Neshavan."

It was an expressionless voice, dull and inhuman. Alai shivered suddenly and clenched her hands at her sides. The garments and figure were undoubtedly Abu Harb's, the muzzle was a black panther's and the hair might have been anything. But the voice! Then slowly the head turned to one side and, following its glance, she saw a white vulture perched on the edge of the wall.

"I slew Neshavan," the voice went on tonelessly. "Because he betrayed to the Tartars the messages carried by my pigeons. Now it hath been said to me that thou hast taken the message sent by one khan to the other. *I* had possessed myself of that missive, and now I seek it. Where is it hidden?"

Alai was not too startled to think clearly. This must be the voice of Gutchluk Khan, yet it asked a very human question. Wisely she waited for more, while she steadied her thoughts.

"Already the Arab Abu Harb hath been questioned, telling only lies in answer. This that you see is his body. It is well not to lie within these walls. Where is the silver tube sealed with the seal of Barka Khan?"

Now that her head was clear the Tartar girl fell to her knees, pretending fright she did not feel.

"Truly thou sayest—" the quiver in her voice was not all assumed— "O voice from the dead. My hand took the silver tube from the pack of the *feringi*, who is a fool besides being accursed."

"And within it there was a writing. Where hast thou hidden it?"

"*Ai*, hast thou the eyes of a grave bird, to see through darkness and distance? I meant no harm. I heard talk of emeralds sealed within the tube. So I opened it secretly, breaking the seal of the khan. As thou sayest, it held a long roll of writing, stamped with a seal."

"And the place of this writing?"

Alai, who had been watching the panther's head intently, was nearly certain now that the voice came from the wall behind it.

"I cast it into the swift waters of the Zarafshan, and now it is gone like a stray leaf in the wind."

"Why?"

"Be not angry, O voice of the night. I was grieved that the tube held no precious things. I thought harm would come of breaking the khan's seal, so I cast it beyond sight."

Silence fell upon the courtyard and, as if emboldened by it, Alai rose and edged toward the outstretched figure. Suddenly she reached out and touched the panther's head, feeling the hard surface of a lacquer mask. Gripping this in both hands she lifted it, disclosing the very much alive head of Abu Harb. A gag had been thrust into his mouth, and his jaw bound tight.

Glancing behind him swiftly, she made out a large crevice in the stone wall, a yard away, and thought that the voice must have come from there. She tugged loose the cloth, and Abu Harb spat out the gag.

"Where is Lord Nial?" she whispered, so that he barely heard.

"In the house of Mir Farash. Nay, do not touch me. This is a place of many devils."

A hissing as of a dozen snakes rose from the empty pavement beneath them, and when Alai started back the scream of a panther rose from the wall. She waited, breathless, expecting to see a living beast spring over. But the lantern appeared behind her, and the blind custodian of the gate beckoned toward her angrily.

"Go," Abu Harb moaned. "Obey them. There is no hope for me."

There was menace in the silence of the court, and she was powerless to loose the Arab's bonds. Quietly she followed the blind man out.

WHEN the old slave woman had escorted her back to the house beside the bazaar and the door had been barred behind them, Alai lifted her head with sudden decision.

"Take me to thy lord, Mir Farash."

Uneasily the hag peered up at her.

"Nay, at this hour he is taking opium, and women may not come into his presence."

"I come at the bidding of Gutchluk Khan."

As though against her intuition, the hag led the Tartar girl up the tower stair to a drawn curtain, and motioned toward it. Alai pointed down the stair impatiently.

"Shall such as thou linger to hear the words the voice sends to thy lord? Go and wait below."

When she was sure that the woman was really frightened and out of hearing, Alai lowered her veil, ran swift fingers through her dark tresses and repressed a shiver as she parted the curtains. The chamber within was close sealed, lighted only by a colored lamp upon the floor. She caught a glimpse of a shrine behind it, bearing a gilded statue of many-armed Siva in the pose of the dance of death. The hangings were embroidered with rose colored figures of dancing *yakshas,* while the air reeked of scent.

Mir Farash sat back indolently upon the cushions of the divan, staring at her through half closed eyes.

"What devil brought thee hither?" he wondered audibly.

In a single glance Alai decided how much he had drunk and how far he was master of his own mind. With a half smile, and unmistakable delight in her dark eyes, she knelt by the divan.

"*Ai sarkar-i- 'aziz*—O cherished master, I come at Gutchluk's bidding, for I have been to the court by the pool. Verily also I would thank thee for taking me from the hand of that infidel."

"And verily by the gods—" Mir Farash forgot to play the devout Moslem—"thou hast changed thy heart, for in the valley when I found thee under the circling vulture thou didst fight like a she-leopard against being carried to the trail. But I had seen the horses of the two men and I was not to be led astray by thy tongue."

His words came slowly, although his memory played nimbly down the space of years. To his eyes, Alai appeared a youthful and lovely goddess, clad in strange garments, surrounded by an elusive crimson light. In that glow the trail to Paldorak took shape dimly. Alai weighed his words instantly, pondered what lay behind them, while she held his eyes locked in hers.

"Have I not come hither to serve your exalted presence?" She whispered long praise of him in Persian. "Look, O Earth Shaker, I make ready a new drink for the pleasure of your Nobility."

She let him run his fingers through the smooth tangle of her hair while she inspected the enamel jars of liquids and the gold boxes of powders on the table

beside her. Selecting raw *arak*, she mixed the spirits with *bhang* and offered him the cup with a melting smile. Warily he sniffed at it and drank a little. And Alai appeared to become lost in contemplation.

"In the court," she murmured idly, "Gutchluk Khan said that the accursed Tartars had lifted their standards to attack Paldorak. May they become lost and stray!"

"All is at the feet of the gods, little Alai. Siva the Destroyer strikes unseen. Nay, wauld the Tartars have come if they had not seen the missives written by Gutchluk to his men in Samarkand? Before then they feared him, as a wizard dwelling upon the heights. They knew how he took plunder from the caravan trails, but they would not go against him. Neshavan sent the missives taken by his hawks from our pigeons to the Tartar *hazara* khan at Samarkand."

This, although interesting, was not what Alai had hoped to hear. She seemed to pay little heed.

"Still, they did not move against the power of Gutchluk, who is not to be seen."

"Our spies told us of preparations made, and of a report to be sent to the great Kublai Khan, who dwells by the garden of Xandu where all magic is made." Mir Farash followed the drift of his thoughts, until Alai prompted him again, this time holding his eyes, her dark head swaying a little.

"Surely that was the letter your men stole, and that I stole from the *feringi* with the head of a lion and the heart of a stupid boy. Now he lies within the chains of your power here in this tower."

"Nay, below. In a chamber beneath the quarters of the dogs my servants."

"By the stair?"

"The first chamber by the door into the bazaar." Mir Farash blinked uneasily as he emptied the cup. "We will give him up to the Tartars for gold, perhaps. Who knows what his portion in life is to be? There was a prophecy told in the *serai* of Samarkand that this Lord Nial would carry his sword to Kublai Khan despite all that lies in his way. Our kismet will be known before the moon is full."

"How?" Alai whispered.

But Mir Farash was lost in his thoughts. She watched him for a moment, then sang under her breath the song of a wizard who leaped from height to height on a winged horse, and of a Horde of warriors who sought to shoot him down with their arrows.

"Ay, the Horde," he breathed, his hands quivering. "The Horde that finds its way over the mountain barrier. It goes where the wind goes, and how can it be turned aside?"

"Then it is coming?"

"It is drawing near the gates. It is coming with power to crush and to slay."

"By what road?"

Alai's voice no longer caressed. She cried out the words, penetrating the drug stupor that enveloped the Persian's brain. Already she had discovered where Nial was confined, and something more. Mir Farash fought against fear of peril and dread that the Tartar warriors might raid the city of Gutchluk. The letter that Gutchluk sought might have tidings of an attack to be launched upon Paldorak. Gutchluk had known that the stolen tube contained a letter. But Alai knew that Paldorak had nothing to dread from the Tartar regiment coming up the Zarafshan valley. The gate at the summit of the pass surely could never be forced. And Mir Farash had spoken of gates.

"By the other road, from Khodjent, from the North." The Persian's voice was only half conscious.

And Alai drew a long breath of satisfaction. So a second division of Tartars

was on the march toward Paldorak through the northern valley. She remembered the break in the barrier hills there.

"Where lies the gate upon this road?" she demanded.

Mir Farash shook his head slowly.

"The path of the valley is open—open, if Gutchluk can not close it."

He seemed to be asleep, although his hands moved restlessly at his throat. No longer heeding him, the Tartar girl investigated the room swiftly, taking up a rose colored khalat she had noticed in one corner, and searching until she found one of the Persian's long turban cloths. Then without a sound she picked up his girdle cloth and long scimitar. Slipping out of the lamplight, she drew on the pink khalat, which covered her own long sleeved coat, the two making her appear almost the size of the slender Persian.

More carefully she coiled her dark tresses close upon her head and wound the white silk turban cloth fold upon fold, glancing at the motionless figure on the divan for guidance, until the heavy turban became the image of Mir Farash's, except for the long end which she drew across her lower face. Winding the waist cloth above her hips, she thrust the scimitar sheath through it and slipped through the curtain.

"*Ohai*," she called with the Persian's intonation. "By Siva, who waits below?"

A rustle answered her, and she stepped into the shadows beyond the stair. The hag appeared, muttering, with a candle. When the woman had vanished into a room, Alai descended the stair quietly, passing her own room, and searching through the dark corridors until she found another flight of steps leading down. It was then the early hours of the morning and the only souls awake seemed to be a half dozen *Kara Kalpaks* who yawned over dice by the main gate.

ALAI dared not risk calling for a light. In half darkness or moonlight her figure might pass for the Persian's. She made her way down to the lowest corridors, seeking for a door that might lead to the bazaar. Instead, she found a tribesman squatting against the wall by a smoking lantern; he scrambled to his feet at her approach. The door behind him was bolted.

"I will take the *feringi* with me," Alai murmured, keeping her distance from the light. "Do thou go and saddle two horses swiftly. Bring them into the alley of the bazaar."

Evidently Mir Farash was feared, for the man almost stumbled as he hastened to unbar the door at the corridor end and vanish into the darkness. Alai possessed herself of the lantern and entered the room he had been watching. And Nial, waking at the sound, looked up indifferently, then in amazement, as the girl tossed the loose turban end from her face.

"Be silent," she whispered. "Come!"

Leaving the light in the corridor, she passed out into the alley. When he followed she took him by the hand, leading him into the gloom of an archway opposite.

"Wait for a little," she cautioned him. "Do not speak. There are ears awake in this place."

"You have a sword."

Impatiently she thrust the sheathed scimitar into his hand and placed her own hand upon his lips. Then she watched while slouching figures emerged from nowhere and hawk-like faces peered in at the half open, lighted door. The prowling tribesmen passed on, and presently the *Kara Kalpak* appeared, leading two restive saddled horses. He seemed startled when Alai and Nial came up from the darkness, but the girl put a stop to his questions by mounting

with a leap and trotting off, raising echoes in the alley courtyards.

Not until she reached an open square, where only hungry dogs moved, did she draw rein and wait for Nial.

"*Wallahi.*" She bubbled over with pent-up laughter. "Where have I not been! Oh, it is good to breathe clean air again. Did they take your great sword away, valiant Lord Nial?" A glance at his grim face silenced her amusement. "But you have another sword, and now must it clear a way for our escape. I know the way. There is a path to the north, to the great caravan road at Khodjent. Aye, the Tartars are in that valley, moving upon Paldorak. They will take vengeance for the blood of Neshavan. They will greet me as a friend. Come, before Mir Farash rouses to search for us, or Gutchluk makes new magic!"

"What befell Abu Harb?"

"Up yonder he is—" Alai inclined her head toward the ruin upon the height —"bound, in Gutchluk's hands. Perhaps he is dead by now."

At Nial's exclamation, she told him of her visit to the court beyond the pool and her words with the old Arab.

"He bade me go, and what he hath seen I know not. As for Gutchluk, I think he is no more than a man skilled in trickery who throws his voice from place to place, like the conjurers of Ind. Aye, he makes his voice fly back from cliffs. I lied to him about the letter of the khan."

"You stole the silver tube!"

"Nay, I hid it. You would not cast it away; so when anger came upon me, when we watched the *Kara Kalpaks*, I went down to the horses, sending Abu Harb away. I took the tube wrapped in its silk and hid it where no thieves pillage, under the stones of the shrine, the grave. But first I looked to see what was within it."

"The devil!"

"A writing, bordered with crimson and heavy with gold, with gilt lettering. *Aye*, how could I read it? It was the Mongol writing, from one great khan to another."

"So the seal is broken," Nial said gravely.

"What harm? Gutchluk hath it not and the Tartars will not find it upon you, O slow of wit. Come! Soon the moon will be low."

But Nial shook his head slowly, his hands gripped on the saddlehorn.

"Go, little Alai, seek the men of the Horde. I may not take the road while Abu Harb is a captive. We have shared his salt."

"His salt! And hast thou not shared mine, that day near Talas? Have I not made smooth thy path, putting aside the thorns and spying out the peril that was hidden?" She urged her horse closer to his side, her eyes dark with sudden anxiety. "Think, Lord Nial, how the path of safety lies there below us. Among the Tartar warriors thou wilt have honor, and I also—for the name of the *noyon*, my father, is not forgotten among them. In the camp of war thou art like to a raging torrent; none can stand against thee."

Nial smiled reminiscently.

"I thought it was thy wish, little Alai, to serve this wizard khan."

"O fool, to believe that!" Impulsively the girl lifted her head. "*Kai*, I can reveal to thee the wisdom of unknown things. Thou canst take command in the Horde, crush these snakes of Paldorak and make a kingdom out of these hills. Together we can ride where the eagles play."

Timidly her fingers brushed his throat and lips, while the moonlight painted in elfin colors the loveliness of her face, eager as a child's.

"Only come away, now. Up there is an evil power that will break thy sword and destroy thee. Come with me!"

"Nay, Gutchluk is a man." Nial laughed under his breath. "And if he

hath slain Abu Harb, he shall know the taste of steel."

The girl's arms fell to her sides. She knew beyond doubt that he could not be turned from his purpose—that he would always make his own path and follow it.

"Then will I show thee the door of Gutchluk," she whispered, "and I will wait until thy coming."

When she gathered up her rein she was singing, so softly that he barely caught a word or two, something about a lion among men that would never be chained. Behind them the alleys of Paldorak resounded with shouts that were like the snarling of dogs.

CHAPTER V

THE GOD OF DARKNESS

A FAINT haze hung about the moon, and the chill of the air told Nial that dawn was not many hours off. Even the shadows were blurred, as if a veil had been drawn across the height and the great ruin upon it. To the Scot, making his way cautiously along the dark side of the broken walls, this stone citadel appeared to be the work of an ancient civilization before the time of Cathay. Certainly neither Arabs nor Iranis would have known how to shape these massive limestone blocks.

Such ruins were held in superstitious awe by the tribes, and it occurred to him that Gutchluk had taken up his quarters here to be safe from intrusion. All the valley lay open to his watch, but he could not be seen from below, and it would be a simple matter to come and go as he wished at night. Abu Harb had insisted that not even the chieftains of the *Kara Kalpaks* knew the face of the magician khan; and Gutchluk might sit in the bazaar below or ride down the Zarafshan trail unnoticed. He sent commands by the blind guardian of the door, or in written messages. Perhaps Mir Farash knew his secret.

"Faith," the Scot murmured, "where will he be sleeping?"

Over rubble heaps and upended columns Nial climbed as quietly as possible, ducking under pale wraiths of fig trees, and more than once standing motionless when the hiss of a snake rose from the ground. Although he listened intently, he could hear no other sounds; the night wind carried away the fretting of Paldorak. And he saw nothing moving. Steadily he made his way toward the point where Alai had found the stagnant pool.

He did not come upon the pool, but when he crawled over the breast of a wall he looked down directly into the grassgrown courtyard. A triangular cross of wood stood at the far end, but nothing was to be seen of Abu Harb.

Investigating the roofless passage at the rear of the court, he came upon several small crates of pigeons, having been guided thereto by the faint rustling of wings. The crates bore different silver labels, and he knew these must be messenger pigeons.

That passage, too, seemed clear of débris, and he followed it to the gaping door of a half fallen tower. It was free of creepers, and he found the steps within solid enough. Climbing without hesitation, he came out on the fragment of the upper flooring and risked thrusting his head over the parapet.

All that end of the ruin lay exposed to the dull glimmer of the scum coated tank. But what caught his eye was a faint light coming from the ground a stone's throw away. Studying it, Nial satisfied himself that it rose through a square opening. Evidently the source of the light was below the level of the tower and court.

The opening would be a light or smoke hole, and he would have to search elsewhere for a stair leading down. Doggedly

he descended the tower, and bethought him to search its lower chamber for other steps. He almost fell down them, for the tower had stairs leading below as well as up. They were also clear of rubbish, kept smooth by use.

"Now," Nial thought, "here is a runway, but whither?"

At the bottom of the steps he could feel both sides of a smooth, walled passage, and he wished heartily for the light he dared not use. In a moment he discovered twin gleams of green light that moved uneasily, keeping always together. It did not need a swift snarl to tell him this was a leopard or panther in the passage.

Drawing his long scimitar, Nial advanced slowly, watching for the animal's eyes to lower for a spring. Breathing heavily—to face a great cat in darkness is no light task—he swung the sword before him, and the beast whirled away. Nial went on, trying the stones before him with the sword tip.

Presently he was aware that the passage had opened into a larger chamber with rows of squat columns on either hand. Once his outstretched hand touched a face of cold stone. He felt it curiously, discovering that it was a statue with many arms. But behind it a line of reddish light stretched along the floor.

Nial made his way toward it, felt the heavy folds of a curtain and parted it cautiously.

He looked into a red chamber. At one end upon a polished dark stone sat a resplendent figure in a crimson robe with a face as black and impassive as the stone. Its arms were resting on its knees, and through its fingers were wound strings of precious stones that sparkled in the glow of the single lamp. The shade of the lamp was thin horn, colored red, filling the chamber with its hue, except for the face of the sitter directly above it.

Before the impassive figure stood a taboret bearing food, beside which knelt a figure in the plain *khalat* of a servant —an emaciated man with a shaven head that turned uneasily from side to side.

"A temple," Nial thought, "with a strange god therein."

He stepped through the curtain, sniffing the heavy, musk-tainted air. The servant faced him like a startled snake.

"What seek ye?"

Advancing to the lamp, Nial looked curiously at the motionless figure.

"I come to Gutchluk Khan. Where is he?"

"He hath gone from this place."

"Whither?"

The servant was not the blind man. His green eyes had the uneasy stare of a beast's.

"Who am I to know? He changes his shape and goes whither he will. As a vulture he circles the valley, untiring; as a snake he spies out the secrets of the earth."

"Nay." Nial laughed. "I think he is a man. But what is this?"

"Do not touch it! Hast thou no fear? That is his body, to which he returns when he would take human shape."

MORE than ever the servant's eyes reminded Nial of a leopard's; and as he stared into them he felt a physical weariness. A band seemed to be drawn about his forehead, and he shook his head instinctively. Then he was aware of the servant rising slowly from the floor, coming closer to him. Twin points of light glowed in the green eyes, growing larger as he looked.

With an effort Nial turned his head away and strode toward the seated figure on the pedestal, breaking the hypnotic spell that had drawn him close to stupor. Sharply he struck the black head with the flat of his sword. As he had expected, he heard a hollow impact with lacquered wood.

The figure in the crimson robe was lifeless, but so cleverly prepared that even the eyes of painted porcelain seemed human. He would have examined the amazing jewels in its hands, but the servant, drawing back, moved silently toward the curtain.

"Stay, thou!" The Scot faced him abruptly, the scimitar raised. "Thy name?"

"Toghrul."

"Tell me no more lies. Where is Gutchluk Khan?"

The man stared at him sullenly.

"Who can know? He leaves no tracks, and not even I have seen his face. But there is one sure sign by which he is known: Even the birds and wolves flee before him, for whatever he touches is blighted."

"What is he—a *Kara Kalpak?*"

"Would they obey one of their own clan? Nor is he a Tartar, nor a Cathayan."

"What then?"

Toghrul blinked at the scimitar, his thin lips drawing back from his teeth. Yet he showed more hate than fear.

"Some say he was once a priest of Siva, who learned how to draw power from the dead. Perhaps he himself is a *yaksha*—one of the dead souls, dreaded by beasts."

Picking up the lamp, Nial cast a glance around the temple chamber. Toghrul was its only living inmate, and he could see no other door.

"Take me to thy prisoner," he ordered, "the Arab, Abu Harb."

"Come, then." The shaven man grinned evilly. "I will show you his tomb, his living tomb."

Warily Nial kept close to him as they entered the outer chamber, only notic-

ing swiftly that a great deal of wealth lay piled haphazardly here. Bales of white camel skins were stacked beside blocks of jasper and clear rock crystal. A peacock fashioned of plated gold and lapis lazuli, sparkling with amethysts, stood by a jade urn. Valuable weapons lay rusting on the floor, while in one corner rested two gigantic horns tapering gradually to trumpet mouths. He wondered if such horns, turned down the valley, could send a blast that would be caught and carried on by the echoes. Gutchluk seemed to knew the vagaries of the echoes.

"Here is what thou seekest!"

Toghrul lifted the bar from a gate of marble fretwork and drew it toward him so that he stood between the wall and the gate. Within the opening was darkness.

"Go in! Thou wilt see where he is buried."

But Nial heard a movement within the cell, and quickly set down the lamp upon the pavement. The next instant he was fighting for his life, wielding the scimitar with a desperation he had never felt in conflict with human foes. Without a sound except the scraping of claws upon the marble, three large dogs had rushed at him.

They were part mastiff and part wolf, the breed that in some mountain regions of Asia is kept to devour human bodies. They whirled to spring at him from the side, while Nial stepped back, slashing the first across the head and leaping clear of the others. He struck one upon the ribs without effect, but a second blow cut a foreleg from the brute.

The third mastiff hung back, snarling. Nial had an instant's respite, to see that Toghrul had vanished. Then, struck by something unseen, the lamp shattered and the light went out.

Nial turned and ran to where he had seen the outer passage. Against beasts and a man like Toghrul he was helpless in the dark. His shoulder struck the side of the passage, and in a moment he stumbled upon the steps.

"Oho!" A strident voice laughed behind. "Gutchluk Khan comes! Who will await him, at his feet? Oho-ho!"

A sound of rushing wings drowned the snarling of the dogs, and Nial took the stair in long bounds, running out of the tower into the cooler air of the night. The moon had vanished, but a half light filled the sky, and he made his way grimly through the ruins, forcing himself to remember familiar turnings until he came within sight of the entrance gate. No one followed him.

But the whole height was astir around him. A white vulture flapped drowsily away, and scaly feet scurried into deeper darkness. A man in rags hastened down an intersecting lane, a long staff tapping the ground before him, and blind eyes fixed on nothing.

Nial shivered, feeling his body cold with sweat that did not come from fear, but from loathing—the ageless loathing of creeping, shapeless things that chills the blood of men. He knew now why Alai had said a sword could not prevail against Gutchluk's power.

Then he came out into the open space by the entrance and drew a deep breath of relief. He leaped over the tumbled stones and saw Alai.

She was lying in front of the gate, her head on her outstretched arm. The turban had fallen off and the dark mass of her hair spread over the ground. It was strange that she should fall asleep on the cold earth in the pathway.

"Alai!" He knelt beside her, his hand on her shoulder. "We will go now, to your people."

Swiftly he drew her other arm from her breast. She had pressed the turban cloth against her side, and the whole cloth was dark with blood. Nial caught his breath, and his fingers quivered as he felt for some movement of her heart or lungs. Alai no longer breathed, and her eyes, half closed, did not seek his.

Silently he pressed the eyelids shut, setting his teeth as the girl's long lashes brushed his fingertips.

A low laugh, mocking and maudlin, came from the murk of the wall.

IT WAS the voice of Mir Farash, and it stirred cold fury in the Scot. He was on his feet when two *Kara Kalpaks* rushed out at him. His scimitar slashed down the first blade to strike at him, and he leaped among the struggling figures of the tribesmen as a wolf leaps into a dog pack, or as an Arab rushes, to strike and whirl away.

Because he recked not at all of caution, because the long curved blade driven by the force of a steel-like body slashed through shields and sheepskin coats, because their own number hampered them in that dim light, the *Kara Kalpaks* were struck by fear.

"*Shaitan!*" one cried. "A devil."

At the cry they fled—some of them staggering—leaving two of their band moaning on the ground. And Nial saw before him, shrinking back from him, the white turban and broad face of Mir Farash. The Persian, still somnolent from his opium, had not realized that the *feringi* could scatter the half dozen swordsmen of his bodyguard. Before he could turn to flee the scimitar whipped around his yataghan and drove into his vitals beneath the heart.

Screaming, Mir Farash bent forward, falling as the scimitar was drawn clear.

"A dog's blood is on it!"

Nial threw the scimitar down upon the body of its owner. Then, because he must have a weapon, he searched the ground with his eyes, stooped to pick up a familiar sword.

It was his own, dropped from the hand of one of the *Kara Kalpaks*. Nial gripped its hilt and thrust it through a fold of his waistcloth.

"Faith," he muttered, "I'll not be needing a sheath for awhile."

Wiping the sweat from his eyes, he looked around, seeing nothing moving in the heavy murk of the setting moon. Gently he picked up the dead girl and sought the wall where she had tethered the horses. Why had she not slipped away from Mir Farash and his men? Surely she must have seen them coming. Had she tried to enter the citadel to warn him—had she sought to save the horses? He could not know.

The horses were where he had left them, and he chose the better beast. Carefully he mounted the restive horse and, bearing Alai on his arm, rode into the darkness at a footpace.

Circling the mass of Paldorak, and avoiding the huddled camps in the fields, he made his way to the shore of the lake. He searched patiently until he came upon a poplar grove with an outeropping of sandstone within it. Then he dismounted to wait for daylight when he could see to dig a grave.

Behind him, at the dark entrance of the citadel, a lean form prowled over the ground, examining the three corpses. Toghrul made no sound as he went about his investigation, his eyes seeming to penetrate the night like an animal's.

When he came to Mir Farash he turned the dead Persian over contemptuously with his foot. As he did so the scimitar clattered on the stones, and Toghrul picked it up. He felt it curiously and knew it to be the one the tall *feringi* had carried earlier. Puzzled, he weighed it in his hands, his bent head ever turning from side to side, for he felt danger near him.

IN THE second watch of the following night Mara Nor, in command of the advance of the Tartar column from Khodjent, made his rounds with his usual care. He was a veteran of many campaigns, whose pride was his clothes. But pride in his personal appearance did not prevent

him from covering his body mail with dark grease to prevent its reflecting the moonlight.

On short, calloused fingers Mara Nor checked off the points of his inspection. His first pickets were awake, in pairs, on either side of the stream which bisected the narrow valley. They had whistling arrows to give warning, and bronze basins to beat in case of an attack. He himself had colored lanterns ready at hand which, if lighted, would signal his needs back to the commander of the regiment, camped a short ride behind him.

That afternoon he had investigated the pine growth on both slopes of the valley, finding traces of many haphazard encampments, but no lurking tribesmen. Now he had sentries in pairs within the screen of the pines. His fires were out of sight, in a gully. The horses of the detachment were saddled and amply guarded. Everything was as it should be, in case a *gur-khan* came down to inspect his command.

But Mara Nor did not feel contented. Within bowshot of where he sat the ravine with its trail debouched into the grass of the wide, sunken valley, and that afternoon he had scrutinized with keen eyes the distant red stone height of Paldorak.

On that height a *koldrun*—or wizard, dwelt. Unfortunately the Tartar column had been sent to destroy this wizard with all his warriors, coming in from the northern valley, while a smaller detachment of the Samarkand region diverted the attention of the defenders by attacking the western pass. A good plan when dealing with ordinary men, but useless, to Mara Nor's thinking, when facing a wizard, who would know just where they were advancing and who could easily read their thoughts.

Had not vultures circled over them that afternoon, and had not unseen trumpets challenged them at sunset? Were not the conditions—a mountain height, by running water—most favorable to a wizard?

"*Aya tak.*" The stocky Tartar nodded.

Reflectively he chewed a strip of fat that had once been a sheep's tail. As he did so he touched the demonaic figures embroidered on either shoulder of his khalat, the angels of good and evil. Mara Nor believed in obeying both.

A silvery wail rose from the darkness ahead of him, then dwindled to sound clearly again as the warning arrow descended to earth near the watcher who had shot it. Stuffing the remainders of food into his mouth, Mara Nor mounted the pony grazing near him and rode forward.

Out in the moonlight he saw his men confronting a tall horseman in a ragged felt *chaban,* whose eyes smoldered from a gaunt face.

"A *gur-khan* am I," the stranger said, "of the Sarai *ordu.* Lead me to thy lord commander."

Mara Nor scrutinized him with interest. Touching his hand to his shoulder he muttered—

"*Khuru, khuru!*"

"Be silent!" The stranger slapped his saddlehorn. "I am no spirit, but I will send a thunder devil to follow beneath your horse's tail if you do not take me to the *orkhon.*"

"At once!"

Mara Nor could not leave his post, but he sent two men from the herd guard to escort this man, who was like no other, to the tent of the Tartar commander.

"It is one named Nial, from the West," they explained to the servant at the entrance.

Basankor, the *gur-khan* in command, was a red-haired Mongol of the Gobi region, powerful as a bear and as obstinate. He had wrapped himself in a purple silk gown for the night. Two Chagatai Turks, his lieutenants, were with

him—craggy, bearded men, much cleverer than Basankor, but less able to lead men through a tight place. The three stared at Nial curiously.

In response he detached the *gur-khan* tablet from the inner side of his belt and offered it to the Mongol.

"I see. What words have you to say, Nial Khan?"

"First give me kumiss."

At a sign from Basankor, the servant brought forward a bowl of fermented milk from the leather sack at the entrance. This Nial drained thirstily—he had had little drink and less food for a day and a night—and tossed aside.

"I come from Paldorak," he said bluntly, "and I want nothing but to see Gutchluk Khan trampled to death and his power ended. I can show you the way to accomplish it."

Basankor grunted. A man of few words, he found the brevity of the stranger admirable. Yet he sniffed a trap.

"What is the way?"

"How many are your warriors? How many *hazaras?*"

"Two regiments—Chagatais of Issyk Kul, and Mongols of the Kerulon. A few scouts, worthless."

Nial shook his head. Two thousand riders of the Horde, to be matched against the teeming clans of Paldorak. The *Kara Kalpaks* were formidable in their own hills, and the odds would be almost five to one.

"Another division of eight hundred approaches from the Zarafshan valley," put in one of the Turks cautiously, "to close the pass called the Gate."

"They can not enter the Gate. You alone will enter the valley. What is your plan?"

The two Chagatais fell silent, but Basankor was no quibbler over trifles. If the stranger came in good faith, his information would be vital; if he should prove to be a spy, he was in their hands. The Mongol explained that he meant to move in column toward the lake and feint at the town, in reality to draw off to the west, occupy the road up the inner side of the Gate and open the pass to the Tartars in the Zarafshan ravine.

Again Nial shook his head.

"If you turn your backs upon them, the clans of Paldorak will come out boldly and gnaw your flanks. They are jackals, but they will follow and strike and pull down the wounded. The Gate is too strong to take from either side. I have seen. There is only one sure way."

THE three officers waited expectantly, wary of a trick.

"Attack without pause," Nial said quietly. "Divide the regiments and enter Paldorak from two points. Do not try to capture house after house, but press forward to the clear ground by the citadel. Thus you will seize the *kurgan*, the castle of Gutchlak."

"Verily, it will be defended against us," one of the Chagatais objected. "Thus we will have foes behind us and others facing us within the walls."

"The walls will not be defended. No man of Paldorak dares enter them."

"*Ahai!* Because of the wizard's magic?"

"Nay, because of their own fear. Gutchluk Khan is alone in that *kurgan* that can hold all your men, all your horses."

The three were veteran soldiers, knowing the power of a disciplined attack, but they all had some dread of magic workers who brought about storms and plagues and sent thunder down from the sky. Moreover, they knew the Tartar ranks might be shaken by fear of such magic.

"How great is his power?" Basankor asked.

Nial did not make the mistake of trying to convince them that Gutchluk might be an ordinary man.

"Gutchluk," he explained grimly, "can

throw his voice from one place to another. He can change his face and work death by poison. That is true, as I have seen. Yet he has no power to bring down thunder, nor is his skin proof against your arrows. He is evil. His men have slain the daughter of a *noyon* of the Horde. When you have captured him, and when you hold his citadel, his people will be like a snake without a head. You can attack them from the *kurgan*. And the garrison of the Gate will not be able to come to the aid of Paldorak."

Nial knew that the unruly clans would be dismayed at sight of the Tartars in the citadel. But given time, Gutchluk could work mischief even against the disciplined cavalry.

"*Kai,*" Basankor assented curiously, "you look thin and weak—as if you had been struggling with a wizard, Nial Khan."

"Three of his attendants I slew, yet the debt of blood I hold against him is not paid."

"What does he look like in his human shape?"

Nial meditated while the three waited respectfully to hear his views. Men who have fought hand to hand with wizards were not common.

"He might have been a treacherous Persian, but that one is in his shroud by now. He might be a blind old man who carries a lantern, but perhaps is not blind. But I think he is a priest out of Ind, with green eyes and a turtle head, dressed like a servant of a god."

The three breathed heavily in unison. This was verily a magician, a worker of magic. Nial made haste to turn their thoughts another way.

"Basankor Khan," he said crisply, "order the attack for the beginning of the last watch of the night. Then by the first light your columns will be near to Paldorak; and when you reach the height the sun will be up and you can see all things clearly. I will guide the regiment through the center of the city, for the way is known to me. The other regiment will find only a few camps in its path up the slope. Is it good, my plan?"

For a moment Basankor considered, stirring the red crust of the dung fire.

"It is a good plan," he assented. "Go thou with the men of the guard. We wish to talk together unheard."

Before an hour had passed the Scot was summoned by a Tartar archer who said that the commander had ordered all men to saddle at once.

CHAPTER VI

"GIVE ME A KNIFE!"

AT SUNRISE Paldorak resounded with the din of pandemonium. Courtyards and caravanserais spewed forth half clad hillmen and riderless horses to add to the tumult. Scrambling out of sleep, men and women snatched up weapons and rushed to the housetops, while belated drums thumped and renegade mullahs screamed curses at Allah.

Up the steep streets came the grinding roar of trampling hoofs, the smashing of arrows upon shields and the hoarse yelling of struggling men.

The dawn attack of the Tartars had succeeded as only the advance of disciplined cavalry can succeed against irregular fighters. Paldorak had sent scouts out to watch the valley entrance, and these had galloped in with word of the Tartars' approach. But so swiftly did the regiments of the Horde move that they were not a quarter hour behind the tidings, and the bands of horsemen mounting hastily by the lake had been swept away by a charge following a flight of hard sped arrows.

In the semi-darkness the clans could not guess the number of their assailants. and the Tartars were well into the streets before the *Kara Kalpaks* could

form above them to offer real resistance. Yelling throngs began to appear on the roofs, to hurl stones and javelins. But the regiments had seen street fighting before. Heavy leather shields and helmets with horsehair crests protected the riders, and powerful bows kept the men on the roofs back from the parapets.

Nial, riding by Basankor Khan with the Mongol regiment, behind the standard, saw groups of *Kara Kalpaks* charge at the head of the column, to be cut to pieces by long lances and short curved sabers. Clans assailing the rear fared no better, and the thousands of Paldorak hung back to see what the Tartars would do. Heads turned up to the height, outlined against the sunrise, watching for a sign from Gutchluk.

But the Tartars did not break ranks, or enter the square. Nial guided them up to the open ground above the highest roofs, where the rearmost ranks wheeled and began to search the streets with their arrows.

Hot from the fighting, the foremost squadrons did not hesitate to enter the deserted gate of the citadel, although murmurs of "*Khuru, khuru*" were heard as they made their way between the ruined walls.

They pointed to the vultures that flapped away, wondering aloud whether the magician khan had taken the shape of one of those. The blind man was found, running helplessly about the pool; and before Nial could reach him the Tartar troopers had cast him in, to see if he would turn into a fish and save himself in that way. But the blind man sank in the scum, and whatever he might have told died with him.

Basankor made his way to the outlook tower to watch the progress of the second column, which was having more difficult work with the swarms of mounted *Kara Kalpaks* from the camps on the east slope.

"Stay at my side," he ordered Nial. "Now that we have this *kurgan*, I care not where Gutchluk Khan hides himself."

But he sent a squad of dismounted men to search the chambers below at the Scot's urging. They lighted torches and disappeared with grim faces. One of them reported presently at the tower top.

"*Ahatou,*" the warrior grunted. "We have come upon treasure, fine white camel skins and jade—many things taken from the caravans that were robbed in former years by these dogs."

It was some time before a second messenger appeared.

"Only one man was below, although we saw the white bones of others. But he does not look like a magician."

Nial and the Tartar Khan turned to see Abu Harb brought up, held fast by the arms, with a sword against his throat.

"*Ai,* Nial Khawand," the Arab shouted, "what is this battle? Am I a dog to be led about like this? Give me a knife and I will make them sick."

"This is not Gutchluk," Nial explained to Basankor. "It is a hunter, my companion of the road who was taken captive."

"*Wallahi—*" Abu Harb stretched his long arms and yawned at the rising sun —"I see you have won a victory. That is good, but have you brought food fit to eat? I have set nothing between my teeth for a night and a day and a night."

Mara Nor offered him some dried meat, but Abu Harb would have none of meat not slain by Moslem ritual, so they gave him fermented camel's milk until he was content. To Nial's questions he would only answer that he had seen no living man in the citadel but Toghrul, the servant, who had taken him from the *Kara Kalpaks* and had bound him upon the crucifix, hiding him away in a distant cell thereafter.

He laughed when the Tartar soldiers announced triumphantly that they had

found the figure of a seated god playing with precious stones. A god with a black face and eyes that peered with the glare of the dead.

Nial, however, suggested to Basankor that the resplendent figure be brought up and hung by a rope from the wall, so that the men of Paldorak might see how the power of Gutchluk had been broken.

This had a greater effect than he had expected. Masses of people gathered on the roof tops to stare up at the hanging image. Perhaps some had seen it before, or had heard of it. By then the sun was high, and the second column of Tartars had gained the height.

When the horsemen moved out upon the slope, the throngs thinned away below them, and soon strings of camels and horse herds were seen hastening from the city. When the Tartar officers wanted to ride in pursuit of them, the red-headed Mongol refused.

"Let them go, and others after them. When the people below are scattered we will take possession of the town. Later we will follow the caravans. *Kai,* they have no way to go but east."

To Nial he remarked:

"Gutchluk dug his own grave. If he had not kept his people from this *kurgan* it would not have fallen into our hands. If he had not kept his true shape hidden from their eyes, they would not believe him to be that image we have overthrown."

"True," the Scot assented, "yet the real Gutchluk has escaped our hands. And so long as he lives his evil power will endure. Give me a hundred men and permission to seek for him."

"It is a little thing." Basankor was in a genial mood, after the rapid success of the attack. "Take whom you will, and search with the eyes of a ferret. But who could find a wizard in this swarm of ants?"

BASANKOR told off Mara Nor with a picked hundred from the Mongol regiment to go with Nial, and the riders from the Gobi stared with the curiosity of children at the gaunt man with fever in his eyes. Before long they were too occupied to wonder about him. The Scot led them like a pack of hounds through the alleys of Paldorak, heedless of the wailing of women who thought their last hour had come. He dismounted, to run through the house of Mir Farash, and then swept the bazaar, overturning stalls and slashing down curtains, until even the ponies became frantic.

"With him it is always *'Nent-en',*" Mara Nor grumbled to Abu Harb, who rode with them, grimly silent after hearing of Alai's death. "Knoweth he no other command than, 'Forward'?"

"Disobey him, O slayer of flies," the Arab muttered, "and thou wilt learn how much more he knoweth."

Never in a generation of service had the gnome-like *ung-khan* disobeyed an order; yet that afternoon he grew rebellious. Noon had filled the valley with unholy heat, without a breath of the cooler air from above. In this ominous stillness black clouds gathered round the peaks, the sky darkened and a sudden icy blast swept away all memory of heat. The sweat drenched ponies shivered, and at the first reverberation of thunder the men of the Gobi crouched unhappily in their saddles.

Nial was leading them at a relentless gallop across the plain toward the road to the Gate, paying no attention to the scattered groups of *Kara Kalpaks* who took pains to leave them the road. It had struck him suddenly that Gutchluk would not have hidden himself in the corners of Paldorak, now emptied of warriors. The magician would have sought shelter in the hills, most likely with the still unmolested garrison of the

Gate. And as he rode the Scot scanned every face within sight.

His body Gutchluk could disguise, but not the down thrust head or the glare of his green eyes.

Then, with a gust of wind that sent billows of dust racing ahead of the riders, rain smote the valley floor with the force of a thousand giant hammers. It beat upon the shoulders of the men and drenched the laboring ponies. In a moment the temperature dropped unbelievably. Under the lash of the wind the poplar groves creaked and in another moment the red clay of the road softened to mire.

Steam rose from men and beasts, to be whirled away into the gray flood that veiled everything a stone's throw from them. The cold increased, until the rain became hail and glistening pellets danced under the hoofs of the horses.

"Now thou seest," Mara Nor remarked to the Arab, "how this magician sends down his weapons from above to wound us. He covers himself with mist to blind our eyes."

Wiping the blood from his brows where a hailstone had cut the skin, he groaned aloud at a peal of thunder, tossed back from slope to slope until it vanished, grumbling in the upper air.

Then the hail and the wind ceased, and Nial sighted a group of fugitives climbing the road ahead of them. It was a mixed party, well mounted, pressing on rapidly after the drenched figure of a Hindu priest who did not look behind him. A fresh downpour hid them from sight until the summit of the pass was reached.

As if a veil had been lifted, the mist and the rain cleared and a fresh wind whistled through the gorge, over the wall and the closed gate. Some hundreds of tribesmen clung to the wall uneasily, threatened now by the Tartar detachment down in the Zarafshan ravine, and now by the victors of Paldorak. Caught in such a trap, men will either run in a panic or fight desperately and the defenders of the wall seemed undecided which to do.

They shouted no defiance at Nial's small band, and no arrows flew; for every hillman knew that a single wounded Tartar would be avenged with sword and fire. And these Tartars, led by the bareheaded *feringi*, were at the heels of the weary band of fugitives following the solitary priest. The priest, whom some of them recognized as one who appeared at times to listen to the talk in the bazaar of Paldorak, now seemed silently intent upon reaching the wall at all costs.

But the *feringi* lashed his horse into a stumbling gallop, circled the priest's companions and caught his rein. Nial had recognized the thrust of the shaven head, and now he looked into the restless eyes of Toghrul.

"Nay, Gutchluk Khan," he cried, "thy road ends here."

Many heard, and Toghrul's companions halted in uncertainty, while the tribesmen on the wall crowded closer to hear the better. The Tartars, coming up on weary horses, were assembled by the matter-of-fact Mara Nor into ranks against one side of the pass, while the wind buffeted and tore at them. All this Toghrul saw as he answered in high pitched protest:

"What words are these, unbeliever? I am no more than a poor follower of Siva—"

"Thou wert but a servant in the *kurgan*. Aye, and a slayer of girls, a feeder of flesh-eating mastiffs, Mir Farash's master—through him thou hast preyed upon the caravans, taking spoil which lay hoarded in the vaults of the *kurgan*. How much better, O one who calls himself Gutchluk, if thou hadst given that spoil to these men of the hills who were kept in the bonds of fear unrewarded."

The words carried to the wall and caused a stir there. Mara Nor, his men being drawn up to his satisfaction, edged

closer to witness this encounter with something he had never seen before, a living wizard.

But Abu Harb's shout rang in the pass.

"Dog, who set upon Neshavan treacherously, who learned deviltry from thy devil god!"

Toghrul's lips drew back from his teeth, and his eyes glowed. His strange intelligence could force obedience from crowds by trickery in which he was not seen; yet he could not, as could this *feringi*, sway men face to face by his will.

"Yea," he screamed suddenly, "I am Gutchluk. No weapons can harm me. Hark to what follows after me!"

His lips tightened, moving only a little. Above his head a clamor broke out —the harsh screaming of eagles. All heads except Nial's turned up in amazement, for the storm-swept sky had not a bird in it. Nial, however, was not swift enough to intercept Toghrul, who in this moment of respite slipped from his saddle and ran with fluttering robe toward the wall.

Abu Harb shouted and leaped down to follow, too late to overtake him. But something did overtake him, flashing over the Arab's head and tearing through the small of Toghrul's back. The flying figure leaped convulsively and crumpled against the wall, shrieking with pain.

Mara Nor lowered his bow and stared.

"*Kai,*" he exclaimed. "He lied. My silver shaft went through him. I brought it forth when I heard that this was indeed a wizard."

In the moment of silence that followed Nial laughed, and the echoes answered glibly.

"Throw down your weapons, O misguided ones. The voice of your master is silenced. Open the Gate now, at once, if you would live."

Hearing this, the tribesmen on the wall muttered uneasily. They had heard the dying man proclaim himself Gutchluk, and now quite clearly he could give them no aid. They knew the futility of trying to hold out against the disciplined Tartars, and slowly—a scimitar or two at first—they cast down their arms at Nial's feet. It was best to yield to one in authority.

The great gate was unbarred and pushed back by the Tartars, who shouted down to their detachment on the far side.

"The way is open. The arrow stitches of vengeance have been taken. Come!"

Nial was setting a guard over the captured weapons when the cavalry from the Zarafshan camp filed past. Among the officers he recognized the long body and impassive face of Chagan, who had been at his heels since their meeting on the post road.

"*Ai,* Chagan," he called, "thou wilt find the silver tube that bore the *tamgha* of Barka Khan hidden in safety beneath the stones of the *shrine* beside the trail three days' ride down the Zarafshan."

"I will send for it. Yet now I no longer follow thy track, Nial. The order was given me to join this command to advance to Paldorak." He glanced curiously at the throngs of prisoners and the piled-up weapons behind the Scot. "Eh, it is well that I need not take thee and bind thee as a prisoner now."

IN A week the aspect of the valley had changed. The *Kara Kalpaks* had scattered to distant haunts in the hills, herded off by patrols of the cavalry. Paldorak, divested of its unruly clans, had settled down to its village routine of cattle tending; many of the hillmen were busied under Basankor's orders in repairing the ruined citadel that would be the station henceforth of a Tartar garrison.

Already a caravan was being assembled, in readiness to make the first trip in years from Paldorak to the Far East, through the passes to Kashgar. This car-

avan was to take with it, as an offering to the great khan, Kublai, the spoil found in Gutchluk's chambers.

And Nial asked Basankor for permission to travel with it.

"Yes, certainly," the *gur-khan* assented readily. "It is a small thing as reward. Thou didst show us the path to enter Paldorak."

"Nay," Nial responded moodily, "it was a girl who opened the path."

Basankor clucked politely, inwardly wondering; he had seen no such woman. But then he considered the *feringi* a little mad.

Abu Harb had been absent from the city, rounding up sundry stray ponies that he had roped and hidden in a ravine, and not until the day of the caravan's departure did he hurry in to say farewell to the Scot. He searched down the line of kneeling camels without finding him. Nor was he with the Tartar officers. The Arab traced him to the lake and found him pacing through a poplar grove where a heap of broken sandstone lay against an outcropping of rock.

"*Wallahi*," he exclaimed, "what is this? It is the hour of departure. Where is thy horse?"

"Waiting."

Puzzled, the old Arab seated himself on the stones, and presently bethought him of the shrine and the khan's missive that had been found in it.

"Eh, Lord Nial, then it is true that the girl Alai hid it away. I knew naught of it. *Ai-a*, she was a piece of my liver, the delight of my one eye. May Allah watch over her."

Nial, on the point of telling the Arab that he sat beside her grave, realized that he wished to tell no one where the grave lay.

"After all," Abu Harb ruminated, scratching his ribs, "she was a woman. She loved thee. Thou wert blind in both eyes. Once she wept, saying that after she had lain once in thine arms, thou wouldst hold her fast in thy heart. But it did not happen."

"Eh, what?"

"Yet it did happen," Nial said under his breath."

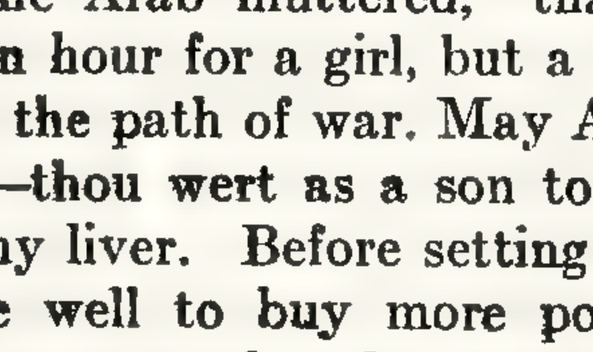
"It is time to mount my horse."

He glanced around the grove, then strode away so swiftly that Abu Harb barely kept pace with him.

"Well," the Arab muttered, "that is the way. An hour for a girl, but a man must follow the path of war. May Allah shield thee—thou wert as a son to me, a piece of my liver. Before setting out, it would be well to buy more ponies, good ones, accustomed to the mountains. I have such. The very ones to delight thy heart."

THE END

You start off with 2 strikes



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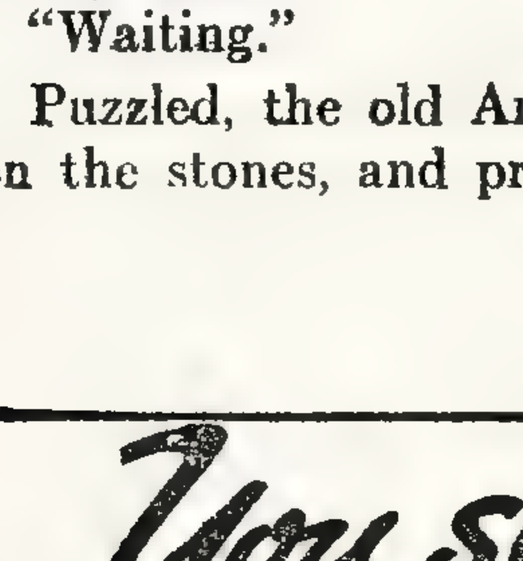

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DEEP WATER MAN

by RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

THE rain slanted through the raw black night and water trickled down Jack Pendeen's neck no matter how tightly he took up on the strap around the top of his oilskin. He was standing because sitting down in the wet, cold cockpit was worse.

The sloop *Mercy* was sliding through choppy, hissing seas under full working sails—a sizable jib and a Marconi mainsail that towered out of sight up the tall, slender mast. Though most of the fog had gone when the wind came up suddenly about south by west, it was still thick in patches and much too dark to see anything ahead but a light.

Rob Kyle, owner of this forty-foot yacht and now at the wheel, was much too busy watching the compass and keeping an ear and eye on the rising wind to strain himself on lookout. There shouldn't be anything dark out ahead.

The short lights, which had been completely obscured by fog just before this wind sprang up about midnight, now showed occasionally on the starboard side. There were plenty of them. The Rhode Island coast on the long, harborless stretch between Point Judith and Watch Hill is no dark, deserted shore, particularly in September.

Rob Kyle, holding her to it as a gust of wind and rain struck bent his sou'-westered head sidewise, grumbling. His ruddy, lined face was lit up faintly by light reflected out of the binnacle from the white compass card.

"I never thought I'd get a wet tail

on this little run, Jack," he said. "But I always do. That damned barometer didn't drop a tenth all day. And we hit what may be half a gale by morning. You should have taken the bus."

"It's airing up," Jack Pendeen agreed.

"A wet tail—that's sailing," Rob summed it all up. Disgruntled, he pawed at his streaming face with a wet hand.

"If we had a third man with us we'd get more sleep," he said. "It's two hours on, two hours off, for you and me. I'll take the first trick. Go below. D'you s'pose you could make some coffee?"

"I'll have a whirl at it." Jack swung down the ladder into the cabin.

While he was pulling off his oiler she rose on a sea and heeled over, trying hard to pitch him into the leeward berth. He edged forward on bent ankles, squeezed past the swinging table on which was spread Chart 1211, ducked three inches and entered the little galley.

Jack braced himself with a shoulder against the side of the food locker, snapped on the electric light and contrived to get the galley oil lamp going. She was jumping around a bit now. The seas were building up fast. He was just dribbling a little alcohol under a burner of the stove when another puff hit the boat and slanted her over further than before. He sprawled across the stove and stopped himself with both hands flat against the leeward side.

Something tinny clattered to the floorboards in the forecastle. A hail came from on deck as the boat eased up again.

Jack Pendeen screwed shut the alcohol tap, crawled aft and into his slicker and clambered up into the cockpit.

"You've got to baby these tall racing sticks," Rob Kyle said apologetically with a look at his towering mast. "If you don't support 'em you lose 'em. Mind jigging up that quarterstay a bit? I'll give you a luff."

He headed the ship into the wind to take the pressure off the mast. While jib and mainsail thundered Jack strained on a line.

"Fair enough," said Rob Kyle, relieved. "That stick's going to need some propping up this night."

Jack Pendeen nodded and looked at the shore lights. They seemed rather close.

Rob followed his glance. "You have the idea." His voice was a trifle curt. "We're too close to the beach to try to reef her down. We've got to carry on."

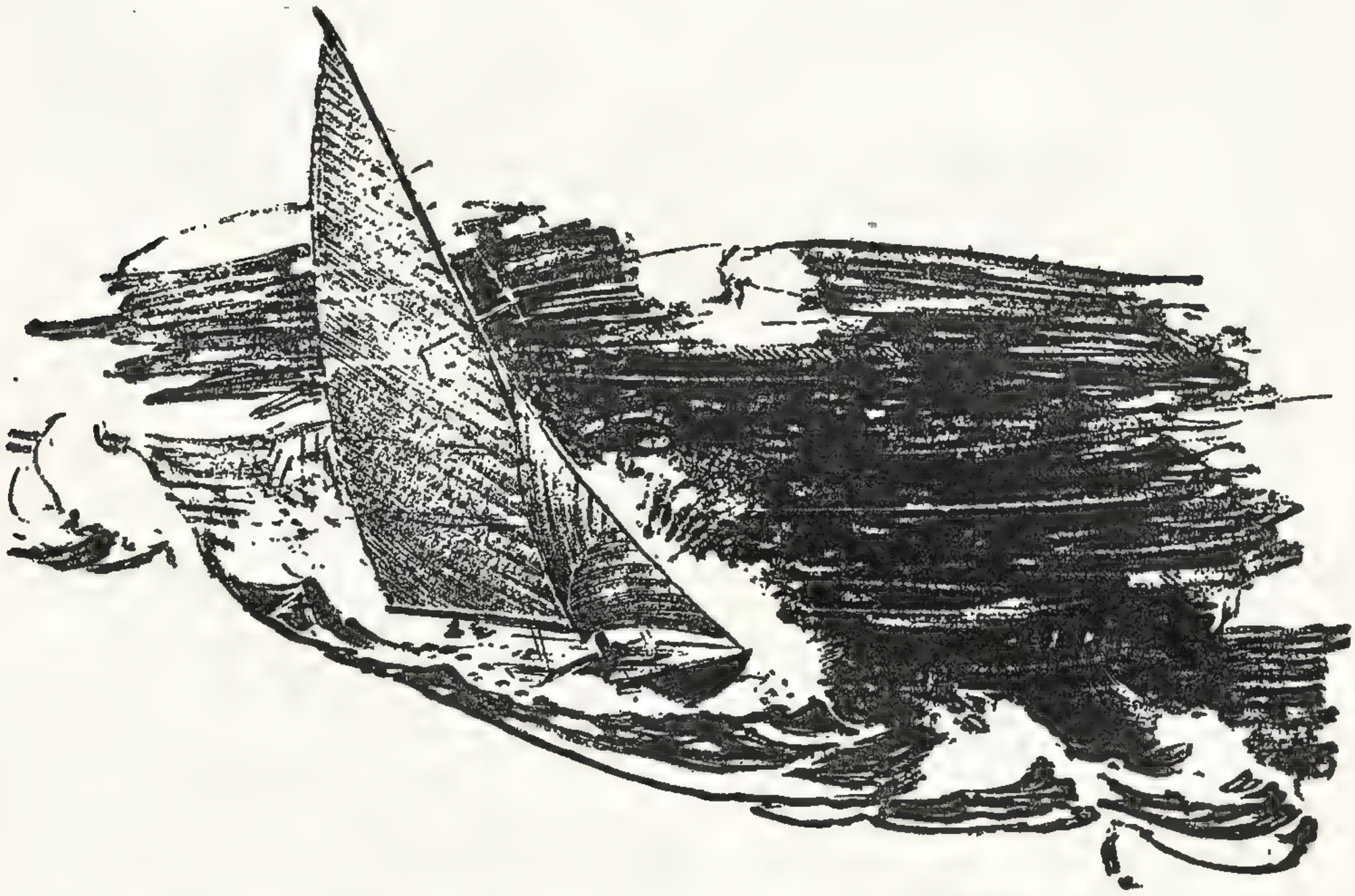
"If you keep on clawing off the land we'll soon have enough room to take a couple of tucks in the main," Jack said, turning his eyes up at the spread of canvas that seemed in the darkness to rise to infinity. "How far to go in the open sea before we can slide inside Fishers Island?"

"About fourteen miles. But I'm lugging sail to ease her, and with this sea stopping her she isn't getting anywhere very fast."

"I'll make the coffee," Jack said. He went below again. There were a couple of cans of soup rolling about on the floor in a small slop of water. A few metal things were jangling persistently up forward; she was slashing through the tops of most of the seas, but a few bigger ones were beginning to throw her about.

HE got the stove lighted this time. Standing with his forehead braced against the rise of the cabin house and his body rigid, he was able to use both hands most of the time. He managed to get the percolator out of a closet and the water and coffee into it. Holding everything simultaneously was quite a job of organization. The bars to keep pots and pans from sliding were in place across the top of the stove and he planted the percolator over the flame with some confidence. The burner had developed a periodic hiss and sputter that he didn't like, but fiddling with it did no good.

He left the stove; gripping the carlines supporting the roof of the house, he made his way aft. He lifted a floorboard at the foot of the companion ladder. The water on the floor was not just a dollop unable to find its way down into the bilge; the bilge was full of water.



He rummaged under the ladder for the pump; then pushed the slide enough to stick his head out and report that there was water on the cabin floor.

"Probably coming through her topside seams," Rob shouted back at him. "She's got 'em all under water now with this heel. They've been dry in a hot sun for weeks. Some through the deck, too. Nothing to worry about, but keep your eye on it. How's the coffee coming?"

"Coming," said Jack. He pushed overside the end of the hose that was the pump outlet and went below to pump. Before he started he took a look at the stove.

It was out. He cursed and lit it again, then pumped. Before he finished throwing the water out of her she took what was almost a knockdown. Jack was dropped into the leeward bunk in spite of himself, and in the clatter of falling stuff he heard the rattle of the percolator jumping the bars on the stove.

She came up fast enough as Rob luffed her into the wind. But the row the mainsail made with the wind shaking it didn't sound too good to Jack.

"There's real weight in this breeze," he told himself.

He flung the stuff from the windward shelves—they had cascaded to the floor—into the leeward bunk, which was considerably lower than the floor. The big pan under the stove was a swashing mess of coffee grounds, sugar and water. The percolator was overturned against the side. He crawled forward into the forecastle and sat down on the floor there to rummage around for a bit of copper wire amid the spare shackles, thimbles, eyes, turnbuckles and other gear in a compartment under the unused pipe berth. When he got up he realized that his tail was sopping wet from the drip through the forehatch. He grinned a bit sourly, remembering Rob Kyle's complaint.

Back at the stove he braced himself and, not without spilling, got more coffee and water into the percolator. Then, jamming himself against the locker and bracing his legs, he wired the percolator to the stove. The chiming clock against the bulkhead spoke four times as he finished. Two o'clock. It was time to relieve the wheel.

Rapidly he flung on a sweater and got into his slicker. The stove was out again.

"Blast you!" he said and climbed the ladder.

On deck Rob Kyle slid stiffly out from behind the wheel.

"She'll head better than west by south, but she won't make that course by nearly two points," he said, and jerked a significant hand toward the bright shore lights. They were still close. In all this time Rob had not been able to work her off that waiting coast.

Jack Pendeen made no comment. He sat in behind the wheel, looked at the compass and put her on west-southwest. The mainsail luffed and thundered and he bore off half a point.

"You're sailing on the jib and lugging the main," Rob said. "She won't handle without the jib. The white light with a couple of red flashes in it you can see under the jib is Watch Hill Light. Any luck with the coffee?"

"On the fire, but the burner's out again," Jack replied. Rain tapped on their oilskins as a gust laid her over. The black water seething along the rail rushed in a torrent up to the side of the house. The sloop spun into the wind.

"Puffy," Jack commented.

"I'll bet I fix that stove!" Rob Kyle said between his teeth. "The fuel pipe's close to the burners. I figure when she heels like this the rising heat causes a vapor lock in the pipe. I'll fix that!"

He lurched below as the sloop staggered off on her course.

JACK PENDEEN slanted his head to the cold wind slashing in over the port side. Watch Hill Light bore practically due west. Somewhere astern would be Point Jude's flashing white. Jack did not look back at it. Point Judith harbor of refuge was out for them. He guessed what a raging maelstrom would be swirling around that formidable point this night.

He reached over and laid his fingers on the jig with which he had set up the weather quarterstay. The Manila line was as hard to the touch as the bronze cleat to which it was belayed. Yet he could feel the tremor of the mast running through the rope. Strain!

"Stay with us, line!" he muttered. "It's a hard beach." His eyes turned briefly to leeward before seeking the compass again. The churned and hissing froth, pale ghost of broken seas, was sliding swiftly past the coaming.

With eyes alert for the loom of high crests and breaking seas on the bow, with wet cheek feeling out direction and force of wind and with ears tense for the rising whine of the stays that meant a bad squall striking, Jack settled down to work out what southing he could.

The wheel was worm type; there was no kick-back to it. But with this much wind he could feel her out as easily as if he steered by tiller. In spite of his efforts he wasn't getting her off that clinging shore. And there was a sea piling up on that beach—a sea that would pound things to pulp.

The sweat on Jack Pendeen's body from his exertions below chilled him fast; the sea water grew warmer on his cold fingers as they gripped the spokes.

The slide opened enough for Rob Kyle to thrust out the end of the pump hose and his head. He shouted something about the stove and vanished.

While Rob was pumping the real knockdown came. With cheek and ear Jack Pendeen divined its coming and turned her into it. But the squall did not

follow the direction of the wind; it struck from further aft, broadside on. Over she went, with tall mainsail thrumming under the pressure of a wind as solid as water. Further and further she lay over, with solid water roaring into the cockpit from the leeward side. The sloop buried half the house, down to her beam ends.

But she came back, slowly, shuddering, as if the effort were taking all the life left in her. The lee coaming, dividing two torrents of water, thrust above the surface. She lifted, bow in the wind, with sails flogging and gear thrashing.

The cockpit, self-bailing, was not important; it would free itself of the weight of water. But the cabin slide had been open a slit for the hose and that was bad.

The slide was closed now. At some time Rod had got it closed. Jack Pendeen paid her off and got her going again. She did not seem so very sluggish.

The slide opened. A whiff of kerosene smoke touched Jack's lungs. Rob's head emerged; he coughed and heaved something to leeward. "Both lamps over—fire to the mattress—extinguisher—O.K.," Jack caught, and a heartfelt word or two about the alcohol burner. Then the hose came up again and Rob continued to pump.

In ten minutes he was on deck for a look at the compass.

"Watch Hill's bearing is a bit south of west, when you can see it," Jack reported. "We're not weathering it. Looks as if we're for the beach. Did the coffee go too?"

"I had the kettle on instead of the perc and nearly boiling—but no dope when she heels that far," Rob reported. "Everything went. Time to see what she'll do on the other tack."

"Give the word."

Jack gripped the wheel and waited. Then, with a startled jerk of his head, he spoked it fast.

A huge thing, blunt, heaving up out of the sea, was almost against their submerged leeward rail. A moment they saw it; then it was past, with Rob whirling to watch it go.

"A nun buoy!" he shouted. "Must be Old Reef! Only one around. We're close in. Four foot spot here. Put her about! Slack that runner!"

Swiftly Jack headed her up, reaching for the jig he had set up so tightly. The thunder of the sails flogged at his ears. Now shrouds and quarterstays on the other side would get their test; Rob Kyle was setting up the jig of the starboard runner with bent, straining body.

She raced away on the new tack with Rob kneeling by the binnacle. He was squinting aft at the great white light that died and twice glowed briefly red in unending cycles. They were heading back from whence they had come, but edging a little more to seaward.

"Might do," Rob shouted cheerfully.

"Nice tough stick you've got in her," Jack said.

"Hope it's as tough this hitch. Might have to be. I'll get at that coffee."

JACK sagged down behind the wheel again. The wind, hitting him on the other side now, completed its chilling work. He felt cold and damp closing in on him in every limb, and turning his stomach against him. Fixedly he stared at the compass, wrestled with the wheel for what windward gain he could achieve, and eased her through the squalls that struck again and again.

The compass suddenly meant something to him. It read east by north. By north! His heart jumped. He raised his head, bent to leeward and peered under the jib. Shore lights—close ahead.

He luffed her instantly. The mainsail shook at once and set the whole yacht shaking with it. She could not head away from the beach. He got her under way again.

"Rob! On deck!" he bellowed, pounding the cockpit floor with his feet.

Rob came up.

"The wind's backed—must be about southeast!" Jack reported. "The big squall came from about there—and now the breeze has gone around. Can't make anything but the beach on this tack."

"Put her about!" Rob said, reaching for the jig on the quarterstay runner. Again the sloop faced the gale and the wind shook at the sails. Then she bore away and jarred along. Her stem smashed a path that slanted away from the beach. Away from the beach! Jack made sure of that by a squint under the jib at Watch Hill Light.

"A southeaster will take us through Fisher's Island Sound like lightning down a rod with this tide astern," Rob declared. "It's a swell break! If I can pick the beacons and unlighted buoys fast enough, I mean," he added. "I think they sold me some lousy alcohol for that stove."

"Do we reef?"

"Not with a downhill wind. Southeast! We sail for shelter before the sea gets around with the wind."

With his eyes on the compass Jack put her on the course. The wind hit behind his ear now.

The *Mercy* slashed through the seas; taking a deckload of water but driving on regardless, driving on toward Watch Hill Light and Gangway Rock, toward Fisher's Island Sound, a tangle of rocks and water where the tide ran like shoal water through a sluice, where buoys were thick as lobster pots and one wrong guess was as bad as a hundred.

But the wind had freed them of that clinging beach. Below, on a wet chart on the swinging table, Rob Kyle worked with dividers, parallel rules and protractor. Finally he came up.

"I can relieve you for about half an hour," he said in Jack's ear. "Then I've got to be hanging over that chart and giving you courses as you pick out the lights. The kettle's on for coffee. Let me take her."

Jack went below. The cabin was a wet shambles revealed by the gleam of one very small electric light. The kerosene lamps were gone; bits of glass from their chimneys crackled in the water under his feet. Clothes, blankets and the innumerable books, instruments, gadgets, tools, toilet articles and other things that had been so securely stowed on the shelves along her sides were on the floor or on the bunks. One mattress bore the marks of that fierce, swift kerosene blaze that Rob had quelled after the knockdown.

Jack staggered forward to the galley. The light was out under the burner. The kettle on the stove had water in it, but the water was tepid to his touch.

Slowly Jack sat down on the littered floor beside the galley. He fumbled for matches but he did not really try to find any. They would be wet. And then he would have to hunt for the can that held the emergency supply.

He was cold, wet, sick, hungry, bruised, thirsty, weary and deadly sleepy. He sagged as he sat and his eyelids sagged with his backbone. The *Mercy* was jumping around in that beam sea so that just sitting still was a feat of acrobatics.

Jack Pendeen clambered up to his his feet. He dragged over to the closet and pawed open cans until he found some matches. He closed the can of matches and lit the stove. While the burner still hissed and flickered in blue uncertainty he fled feebly to the deck.

"I'll take her now," he said to Rob Kyle, who was talking to himself about the characteristics of several lights he could see ahead. "The stove was out but I lit it again."

"Right!" said the yachtsman, rising briskly. "I'm afraid I'll be too busy for awhile to watch that infernal stove. But we can have the coffee later. This breeze is taking you to New London like a bat out of blazes, young fellow."

IN New London harbor in the dirty gray of the morning they picked up a mooring off Burr's place. Though it was gray, yet it was truly morning. And the half gale had died down to soft mist.

"You go ahead, Jack," Rob Kyle insisted as a shore boat frothed toward the *Mercy*. "Sorry the weather was so rotten. I know how it is in your line—you have to be on the spot on the minute."

He nodded understandingly.

"Never done anything in that line myself, though as a kid I was crazy to try it," he said rather wistfully. "You remember that, Jack. But I don't know that I could stand it."

Jack Pendeen pulled himself upright.

"It does get a bit tough sometimes," he said casually. "Won't you come ashore and have some coffee—a bite of breakfast with me?"

The boat was alongside. Rob Kyle shook his head. "I've some picking up to do below—and I want to take another look at that stove. Those two men will be coming. Can't put out this afternoon or tomorrow on a cruise with a stove like—Look out!"

Jack Pendeen picked himself up off the bottom of the shore boat.

"My foot slipped," he said. The boat ruffled away with him before he could say more. Rob Kyle waved cheerily.

Through the wraithlike city Jack blundered, stopping nowhere and for nothing. Within twenty minutes he was climbing the accommodation ladder of the five thousand ton freighter *Menemsha*.

The steward, a family man, stared in goggle-eyed disapproval at Mr. Pendeen coming aboard in such a condition—eyes red-rimmed, staggering, haggard, hardly aware of his surroundings. But he followed nevertheless and caught up with Mr. Pendeen as he stumbled through the door marked "First Officer."

"Would you like a cup of coffee, sir?" he demanded stiffly.

Mr. Pendeen stared at him.

" A cup of coffee," he repeated slowly, emphasizing every syllable. "Yes, steward, I would like a cup of coffee."

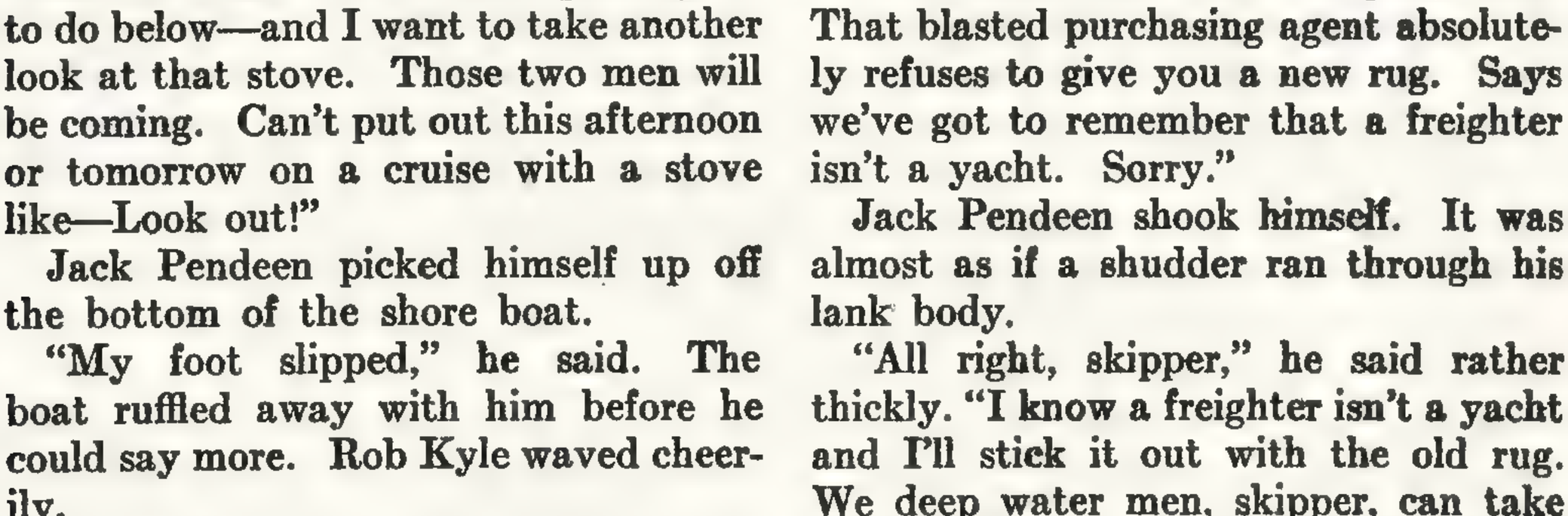
He closed the door and thudded down on his brass bed.

The skipper thrust in his long, inquisitive nose, looked eagerly and coughed violently at the appearance of his chief mate. Then he spoke with haste.

"Got some bad news for you, Jack. That blasted purchasing agent absolutely refuses to give you a new rug. Says we've got to remember that a freighter isn't a yacht. Sorry."

Jack Pendeen shook himself. It was almost as if a shudder ran through his lank body.

"All right, skipper," he said rather thickly. "I know a freighter isn't a yacht and I'll stick it out with the old rug. We deep water men, skipper, can take it and keep quiet about it. God, how we can take it!"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BROWN MAN'S BURDEN

by L. G. Blochman

TORRENCE sat up suddenly. All sleep was gone from him as he listened tensely for a repetition of the sound that had awakened him. Outside in the night, the sea was moaning and sighing as it foamed over the reef but the sea noises had grown to be almost a lullaby in the two years Torrence had been district officer at Pulo Areng. What had he heard in his sleep?

He got out of bed, slipped into a silk *sarong* that Datu Yussuf, the native chief, had given him. The bamboo floor creaked as he walked toward the door. Then the sounds came again.

There was a cry—a wild cry, half animal, half human—followed closely by the crack of gun-fire. Two more shots beat upon the night air.

Torrence crossed the veranda in a bound, hurried down the steps, ran along the gleaming path of crushed coral that led to the sea. The sky, already turning gray behind the jungle-covered headlands across the cove, was low with lead-bellied clouds. It was still too dark to make out the faces of the two Malay fishermen who came running up the path to meet Torrence.

"Tuan! Tuan! Come quick!" they shouted.

Then, as they jabbered excited explanations, they pointed out to sea. Outside the cove, beyond the reef, Torrence saw dimly the dark outlines of a two-masted schooner rocking in the swell. The silhouette of the ship told him it was not a Malay *prau*, but some European

vessel. With long strides, he pressed on down the path.

On the beach, a flare burning in the grotesquely carved bow of a native fishing craft lighted a strange scene. A dory was drawn up on the sand near the Malay craft, and two white men stood in front of it, brandishing revolvers at the angry circle of brown fishermen closing in about them. Torrence's eyes caught the flash of torchlight on bared steel. Then he saw the prone body of a native lying on blood-darkened sand. He pushed through the crowd, confronted the two white men.

One of the newcomers was a big, red-faced man in a pongee suit. Close-cropped folds of his bull neck showed beneath his white sun helmet. His microscopic blond mustache gave him an arrogant air. His companion was small, dark, pig-eyed and sharp-featured, with bandy legs protruding from his khaki shorts.

"*Brentil*" ordered the red-faced man, his ridiculous Malay accent overshadowed by the domineering tone of his voice.

But Torrence didn't halt. He sauntered easily toward the dory. Then, as he sensed the glance of the newcomer moving from his nude, sun-tanned torso to the bare, well-muscled legs below his *sarong*, he realized that, except for the clear blue of his eyes and the slight curl in his tousled brown hair, he might be mistaken for a Malay.

"My name's Roger Torrence," he explained. "I'm district officer here."

The flicker of surprise that crossed the beefy face of the newcomer changed quickly to a sneer.

"I see," he said. Then he turned to his bow-legged companion. "That accounts for our reception, Peters. The D.O. here has gone native."

Torrence's teeth clicked as his square jaw set defiantly. Since the teak mill and the tin smelter had shut down, he had been the only European living on the island. He had been friendly with Datu Yussuf and the other native chiefs, naturally; that was part of his job. But his personal friendships in no way interfered with his professional aloofness as magistrate and sole administrator of the white man's law and order. Nevertheless, he owed no explanation of his informal attire to these strangers. He disliked both of them on sight. They were obviously looking for trouble and probably had found it already.

"The Malays tell me one of you just killed a man," said Torrence. "Who's responsible?"

The domineering, red-faced man stepped forward.

"I'm Harold Swain," he said. "I'm taking over down here for Archipelago Products, Ltd. We own the island, you know. And since they've started building battleships again, the market for teak has . . ."

"Did you kill this man?" Torrence interrupted .

"My assistant, Mr. Peters, was forced to shoot him," said Swain. "He attacked us."

"Give me your gun, please, Mr. Peters," said Torrence.

Scowling, Peters backed away from the district officer's extended hand. He glanced at Swain for support.

"Look here," he snarled. "You can't . . ."

"Please," interrupted Torrence. His tone was one of crisp finality that admitted no argument. The muscles along his jaw twitched. His outstretched hand didn't move.

Peters handed over his gun.

"And now, gentlemen," Torrence said, "if you come up to my bungalow, we'll settle the matter at once."

A BLOOD-RED sun rose steaming from the China Sea while the district officer heard the case on his veranda. Swain and Peters stuck to their story. They

had been attacked by natives, who, even after they had been ordered to halt, jumped into the water after the dory. The Malay fishermen said they had been merely curious as to what men might be coming over the reef at this time of night, and rushed into the water to help pull the dory ashore. When he had heard both sides, Torrence packed tobacco into a crooked pipe, lit it, puffed a moment, then said:

"Mr. Peters, I'm willing to consider this man's death an unfortunate accident —if you are willing to act in accordance with local custom in the matter. I'm sure justice will be considered served if you pay the dead man's family a sum of money. Say two hundred-fifty Singapore dollars. That's not much for you, but for these people—"

"He'll not pay a penny," broke in Harrold Swain. "My company owns this island, and—"

"Your company," countered Torrence, "somehow owns the concession to the forest and mineral products of the island. However, the civil authority here still happens to be vested in me."

"Really?" Harold Swain's tiny blond mustache twitched derisively against the deepening red of his face. "And how much longer do you think you'll keep your job—after I've informed Singapore about the D.O. at Pulo Areng who dresses like a native, fraternizes with natives, favors natives in disputes with Europeans? And in case Government House in Singapore is a little slow, we have a managing director in London who is very close to the Colonial Office. I'm afraid, Torrence, that before long—"

"Mr. Peters," Torrence broke in quietly, "admits that he killed a man. I'm fining him $250."

"I won't pay!" The lift of Peters's thin upper lip, a little more on the right side than on the left, showed yellow, uneven teeth. "Mr. Swain says I shouldn't pay. I won't!"

"Very well." Torrence clapped his hands, shouted an order in Malay. From somewhere in the rear came the clank of metal, the tread of feet. A squad of big, khaki-clad Sikhs swung around the corner of the bungalow, halted in front of the veranda. As they came to order arms, the sun glinted on their fixed bayonets. Their square beards bristled fiercely below their red turbans.

"My police force is not very large," Torrence continued. "But it's large enough and capable enough to keep you in jail, Mr. Peters, in lieu of fine. I'm sorry, because our jail here is rather unpleasant—and you'll have to remain there until I put you aboard the mail steamer for Singapore next week."

There was a pause. The Sikh policemen stood at expectant attention. Torrence, watching the veins bulge on the bull-neck of Harold Swain, blew a smoke ring. At last Swain yanked out his wallet, counted off banknotes.

"All right, Torrence," he said, between tight lips. "I'll pay Peters's fine. But it goes on your account."

"Thank you," said Torrence. "And now I'm going to do you a service by letting you pay the money to the dead man's brother—the elderly gentleman to the left, at the foot of the stairs. He's a *pawang*—personal sorcerer to Datu Yussuf—and a powerful man on the island. You'll want to be friendly with him."

Swain turned, looked down contemptuously at the little crowd of Malays standing in open-mouthed anxiety at the foot of the veranda stairs. Then he flung the banknotes in the face of the white-haired *pawang*, the dead man's brother, and favored Torrence with a faint, triumphant smile, as he said:

"I'll pick my own friends."

"In that case," said Torrence, puffing furiously on the pipe clenched between his teeth, "perhaps you'll excuse me for not shaking hands with you. I don't like you, Swain. And I'd be very happy

if you and Mr. Peters wouldn't come to see me, except on business. Good-by."

He strode into the house to dress.

As he dashed cold water over himself from the Java bath jar, he felt not the slightest regret at having cut himself off from the first possibility of European companionship in more than a year. He would a thousand times rather be friends with Datu Yussuf and the Malay headmen than with Swain and Peters. The Archipelago Products men were swine. They had already splashed blood on the pleasant, peaceful fabric of island life. How long before they would rip that fabric to shreds?

IT wasn't long. In fact, the trouble started almost immediately. Torrence had just sat down to eat his solitary tiffin of curried prawns when Ali came in to bring the news.

Ali was the district officer's chief courier and major-domo of his domestic staff. In many ways he was like ten thousand other Malay youths—his lips were unnaturally red from chewing betel, and his glossy black hair gave off a perpetual odor of cocoanut oil. But he had two distinctions: He was extremely loyal to Torrence, and he possessed the most gorgeous batik trousers north of Java. The pair he wore as he appeared before Torrence on this particular noon—trousers of tussah silk, which had cost him most of his last month's pay—were covered with an intricate Pekalongan design in resplendent reds and greens.

"*Tuan*," said Ali, "they have brought fifty Chinese coolies from Singapore to work in the forest."

Well, there was nothing intrinsically wrong about importing Chinese labor. In fact, it was quite usual in Malayan countries. The Malay, being woefully deficient in the acquisitive instinct which drives the peoples of colder climes to higher and greater civilization, is apt to prove an unreliable laborer. Nature having provided him with practically everything except money, he is quite likely to quit a job after the third day and go fishing. The Chinese, on the other hand, will perform back-breaking tasks indefinitely, as long as he can hear the clink of coin—even copper coin.

"Yes?" said Torrence expectantly.

"The *tuan* with the red face has seized the *kampong* on the hill," Ali continued. "He is quartering the coolies in Datu Yussuf's hill *kampong*."

That, of course, was bad. The hill *kampong* was a U-shaped collection of *attap* huts about a mile back from the sea, in which Datu Yussuf quartered himself and retinue every month or so when he went into the jungle to hunt. The Malay chieftain was certain to resent his *kampong's* being put to such ignoble use as the housing of coolie labor.

Datu Yussuf's complaint, however, did not come until a week later. And it was based on half a dozen other provocations, notably the conscription of a score of Malays by the Archipelago Products men to build a road. Swain had found himself short of labor. So sharp-nosed, bandy-legged little Peters had gone out, a revolver on each hip and a long horsewhip in his hand, to round up a road gang. The Malays, remembering the fatal exhibition of marksmanship Peters had given on the day of his arrival, were afraid to resist. So Datu Yussuf laid the matter before the district officer.

The *datu* was a distinguished-looking Malay, with coffee-colored skin drawn tight over his high cheekbones. The damascened hilt of a *kris* showed at his waist. When he came to Torrence's bungalow, he was accompanied by two minor chiefs, and the white-haired sorcerer, the *pawang*.

Torrence listened to his complaint, then immediately sent Ali to bring Swain. The Malay youth with the gaudy trousers returned shortly with both Swain and Peters.

As he approached the bungalow, Peters marked the nervous rhythm of his gait by swinging his horse-whip in front of him, snapping off the heads of flowers. Tramping up the steps with Swain, and swaggering into the presence of Torrence and the native chiefs, he allowed the whip to hang in the angle of his elbow, while he hooked his thumbs ostentatiously under the butts of his two guns. Swain, on the other hand, was armed only with his florid, arrogant manner, a strong odor of perspiration and whisky, and a copy of the forest concession granted to Archipelago Products, Ltd.

"If you've called us on account of the *datu's* silly grousing," Swain began without preliminaries, "you're wasting your time. We're acting in perfect accord with our rights. Here. Read the concession."

He flung the document at the district officer.

"There's this matter of the *datu's kampong* . . ." Torrence began.

"Covered by Paragraph XII," said Swain. "During teak cutting operations, the Company is authorized to occupy any dwelling houses within the confines, upon payment to the owners of said houses of rent not to exceed one dollar, Straits currency, per diem."

"And this business of road labor—"

"Paragraph XV," quoted Swain, his eyes narrowing with malicious pleasure, "authorizes the company to draft labor for emergency projects provided daily wages of at least thirty cents per man are paid. . ."

Torrence skimmed through the pages of the concession with uneasy eyes. Swain was right. Literally he was within the law. The document had been carelessly drawn by some minor official too stupid to cope with the company's clever attorneys.

"I am afraid," said the district officer, avoiding the smug glint of triumph in Swain's slit-like eyes, "that I am powerless to act, Datu Yussuf."

"It is not just," said the *datu*.

"I agree," said Torrence. "And I shall appeal to Singapore. In the meantime—"

"*Nanti!*"

The white-haired *pawang* was on his feet. His old eyes burned fiercely in their deep sockets. His withered hands gesticulated with surprising vehemence as for a full minute he intoned in sonorous, solemn Malay.

"What's the old witch-doctor shouting about?" interrupted Harold Swain with a sneer.

"The *pawang*," Torrence interpreted soberly, "warns you that he will conjure up all the malevolent spirits in his particular limbo and that they will drive you from the island."

Peters snickered. Swain burst into prolonged, boisterous laughter.

"Tell the witch-doctor," he said, when he had caught his breath, "that we'd be very pleased to have his ghosts drop in for gin *pahits* at seven this evening. Come along, Peters. We've work to do."

When Swain and Peters had gone, there was a long pause. The silence seemed to crawl through the thick, damp heat. At last Data Yussuf asked:

"Are these men friends of yours, *Tuan?*"

"Decidedly not!" said Torrence.

"Then why do you not punish them? They are not good men, nor just men."

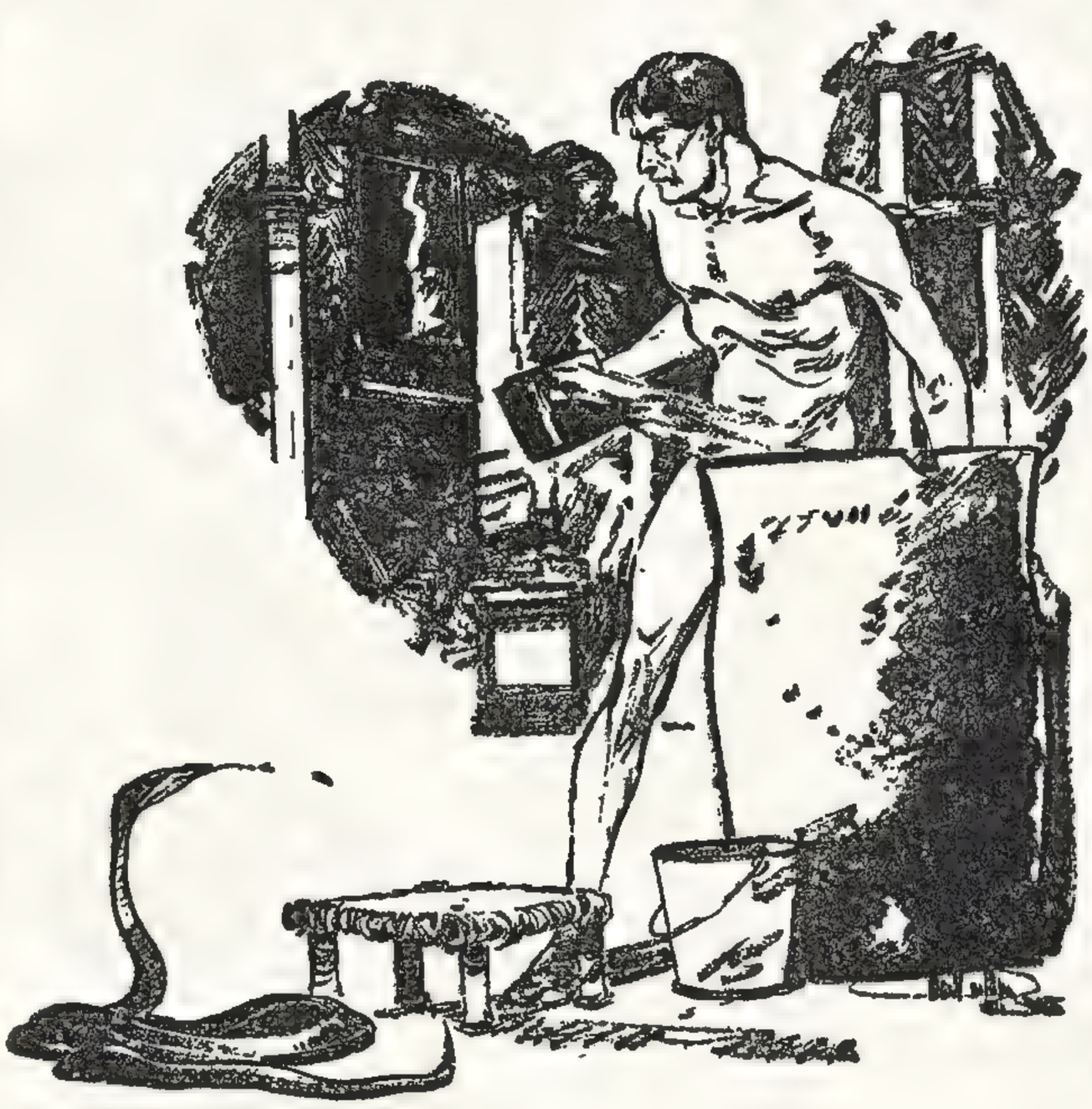
Torrence shook his head. It was difficult to explain to these Malays the devious ways and technical quirks of the white man's law. He had tried before, unsuccessfully. He said:

"Give me time. I will do my best."

The stillness with which the Malays received this promise was eloquent. A strange breath of cold swirled through the room. Datu Yussuf, the *pawang* and the two minor chiefs arose, bowed in silence, took their departure.

Ali, the youth with the batik trousers, stood on the veranda as they left. His eyes were round, his mouth agape. He quickly repeated the name of Allah three

times, just in case he, too, should have been included in the *pawang's* curse. It was all very well for the *tuan* with the red face to laugh, but Ali didn't laugh. Ali knew the *pawang's* power. He knew the old man had traffic with such frightful shades as the shrieking wraiths of women dead in childbirth, and the tortured souls of Moslems whose enemies had wrapped their corpses in the unclean hides of pigs. And Ali was afraid.



Inside the bungalow, Torrence was already writing his report to Singapore, seeking authority to settle this threatening situation without recourse to bloodshed. As he wrote, the lines of worry on his bronzed forehead grew deeper, for the mail steamer would not call at Pulo Areng again for another week.

MAIL day was still five days off when the storm broke. Torrence was awakened by Ali pounding on the iron bed frame. "*Tuan!* Wake up, *Tuan!* The *pawang* has begun his magic!"

Torrence raised himself on one elbow. It was barely daylight. He blinked away the sleep, stared through the haze of the mosquito netting. Outside the window, the upas tree that grew in his compound was strangely distinct in the gray half-light of dawn, raising its smooth, naked trunk a full fifty feet before flinging out its first leafy branches.

"What's up, Ali?" Torrence asked, yawning.

"The *pawang* has sent us a *mati-anak,*" said Ali. "I heard it about the house all night. The noise kept me awake."

Torrence smiled. The *mati-anak,* he knew, was a Malay ghost that haunts the graves of children.

"Why should the *pawang* send his magic to this house, Ali?" he asked.

"The *pawang* is angry with you, *Tuan,*" Ali replied, "because you did not punish the *tuan* with the red face, who continues to do evil."

"All right. Out with it, Ali. What's happened now?"

"The niece of Datu Yussuf—the one with the mischievous eyes—she has gone to be housekeeper for the *tuan* with the red face."

"Damn!" Torrence lifted the mosquito bar and sprang from bed. The end was not far off now. Until today, Swain had been playing with dynamite. If Ali's story were true, he was no longer playing; he was going after the dynamite with a sledge hammer.

Torrence hurried into his primitive bathroom. He scooped a dipper of water from the waist-high Java bath jar. He was about to pour the water over his bare shoulders, when his hand poised motionless in mid-air. As water sloshed over the earthenware brim, a long, scaly form slithered out from behind the jar.

Torrence took an involuntary step backward as he recognized the glistening, rippling folds of an eight-foot hat-snake—swift-moving, aggressive, deadly in its venom, the most dangerous snake in this part of the Indies. A faint hiss as the wriggling tail stopped, the head looped back, told Torrence that the reptile was aroused, that he must prevent it from coiling. He flung the dipper at the upraised head. The head darted aside, tongue flickering. The dipper clattered to the floor. Missed!

Again the hat-snake looped to coil—directly between Torrence and the door. His escape was cut off!

"Ali!" he called. "*Mari sini! Ular ada!*"

The writhing coil tightened, the ugly head lifted, drew back. The flattened segments of the neck, distended into a cobra-like hood, shone like lacquer. As though fascinated by the tiny bead-like eyes, Torrence watched the threatening hood vibrate in quick, horrid arcs.

Then there was a bright streak of gleaming metal. Ali leaped through the doorway, *kris* in hand, behind the snake. The blade struck, slashed, struck again. The hat-snake lay on the floor in half a dozen wriggling pieces.

Torrence drew a deep breath of relief.

"Thanks, Ali!" he said fervently.

"You see, *Tuan*," said the Malay, "I was right when I said the *pawang* was angry. It was he who sent the snake."

"*Mana buleh!*" said Torrence. "We've had snakes in the bungalow before. They are attracted by the smell of water."

But he was more than a little uncomfortable as he watched Ali carry the hacked remains of the snake to the dust bin.

He finished his interrupted bath, dressed, drank a cup of scalding tea. Then he hurried off to the compound of Archipelago Products, Ltd.

"Swain," said the district officer, "you've got Datu Yussuf's niece here."

Swain was breakfasting on a tall gin sling. He finished his drink with great deliberation, and did not ask Torrence to sit down.

"What of it?" he asked at last.

"You'll have to send the girl back to the *datu* at once."

"Nonsense," said Swain. "The girl isn't being detained against her will. She's my housekeeper. And she'll stay here as long as she wants. Since when is there a law against a man employing a housekeeper?"

Swain leered.

"This isn't a matter of law," said Torrence. "It's a matter of *adat*—of local custom and native honor. You know what's going to happen if you keep that girl here, don't you? She may have picked up a few European ideas about the emancipation of women while she was in school in Singapore, but that won't affect the Oriental mentality of Datu Yussuf. He'll have her killed."

"He'll not get his hands on her. An Englishman's home is still his castle, even in the East. And that reminds me, Torrence, that you've got no business in my home either. Get out."

"See here, Swain—"

Swain came around the end of the table, a gun in his fist. "I don't have to put up with you in my own home. Now get out."

Torrence picked up his sun helmet.

"Very well," he said. "If that's to be your attitude, you may as well pack your bags. You're leaving the island within forty-eight hours."

"Yes? And who's putting me off?"

"I am," said Torrence quietly. "I'm sending for a gunboat to take you to Singapore."

Swain's florid face turned purple.

"You may send me to Singapore," he said, "but I'll be back in a week—with your successor."

"That," said the district officer, "will

be most interesting. Good morning, Mr. Swain."

Torrence returned to his bungalow and wrote out his request for the gunboat. He would have to dispatch the message by Malay *prau* to the mainland. With favorable winds, the *prau* could cross to Batu-batu in about ten hours. There was a wireless station at Batu-batu, and his message would be in Singapore that night. He could expect the gunboat in thirty-six hours. Would he be able to keep peace that long?

"THE *pawang* is here, *Tuan*."

Ali's voice shook as he made this announcement. His face was almost as pale as the light shades of tan in the Djokja batik trousers he wore this morning.

"Show him in," said Torrence. He blotted the note he was writing, slipped it into an envelope addressed to the district officer at Batu-batu.

The venerable sorcerer had never appeared more dignified than at that moment, when he strode proudly up to Torrence's desk and delivered Datu Yussuf's ultimatum.

"The girl," he said, "must be returned to the *datu* before the first star appears tonight."

The district officer replied that he could promise a satisfactory solution of the matter, but that he could not allow the *datu* to fix any time limit. He explained that he was sending Swain and Peters away, and that the girl would be back within forty-eight hours.

"The *datu* has no more patience," the *pawang* insisted. "The girl must return before tonight."

"Pawang," said Torrence, "I intend to settle this business without bloodshed. Tell that to Datu Yussuf."

"If you are a true chief," the *Pawang* intoned, "you have authority over your own kind. If you do not act, then the *datu* must act."

"Tell the *datu* I'll not permit any interference!"

The *pawang* smiled. It was a superior smile, tinged, perhaps, with mysterious pity. Then he bowed and left.

Instantly Torrence dispatched Ali to the cove, to send the fastest *prau* of the fishing fleet with the message for the wireless station at Batu-batu. Then he clapped on his sun helmet, went out the back door of his bungalow, and started up the hill with long strides.

The Constabulary lines—the tiny white-washed barracks where Sikh guards were quartered—dazzled before Torrence in the brilliance of the tropical sunshine. But Torrence had hardly entered the building when the day went suddenly dark with new foreboding.

The turbaned Constabulary sergeant greeted the district officer in a fine frenzy of dismay.

"Tuan, a terrible thing has happened during the night. I don't know whom to blame, for I am convinced of the loyalty of my men. It must be that pig of a Buginese sweeper—"

"What's been stolen?" Torrence interrupted.

"Ammunition," the sergeant replied. "All our small-arms stores."

"And how much have you left?"

"Only what each man carries—ten roumds per man!"

Then Torrence knew the reason for the *pawang's* superior smile.

Datu Yussuf, obviously, had taken steps to protect the freedom of action of his own private guard. The *datu's* men, of course, were armed with spears and the traditional *kris*. But he also had a platoon of riflemen. Their arms were antiques, but they were in surprisingly good condition. Torrence had inspected them. He had seen the .58 calibre Mutzig percussion rifles which had done service in the Franco-Prussian war. He had smiled at the Snyder breech-loading .43's that had somehow drifted down from the Philippines after the

Spanish evacuated Manila. But he had to marvel that every one of the *datu's* guns could still fire and with reasonable accuracy.

THEY began firing at eight o'clock that night.

All day long Torrence had continued his efforts for a truce —to no avail. At sunset he had sent Ali to Swain with a final written plea to release the girl. Ali had returned with the long, angry welt of a whip-lash across his cheek. When darkness swept up from the sea, flinging a spangled cloak of deep purple velvet across the sky, the district officer was standing on his veranda, buckling on his holster. At that moment hell broke loose.

A single shot came first—a sharp detonation that split the warm night. A fusillade followed; the crackle of scattered rifle fire, through which Torrence could recognize the deep-toned explosions of the old black-powder cartridges. The harsh throaty chorus of the *sorâk*, the Malay war cry, swelled on the breeze, then died.

Torrence could see the flashes of rifle volleys, flickering like fireflies about the Archipelago Products compound. Then a dozen blobs of orange light sprang into being, the flare of torches, weaving, bobbing, darting crazily about.

Torrence mustered his Sikh guard.

Above the tramp of feet he heard the *sorâk* again, then the wild, deep-throated cries of men who had smelled fresh blood. The pungent scent of burned gunpowder drifted on the wind.

"Fix bayonets!" Torrence ordered.

Ten rounds of ammunition per man, and cold steel. That was enough. With it Torrence would undertake the most distasteful mission of his career. The rescue of two men not worth rescuing, who deserved whatever fate was now closing in on them. Yet Torrence was district officer. He owed them protection. He opened his mouth to order the advance—but the command never came. The battle across the cove had taken a new turn.

The buildings in the Archipelago Products compound burst into flame. Great tongues of scarlet were licking up the darkness. Against the seething background of fire, the figures of men were silhouetted, moving men, running men, But the men were running *away* from the blazing houses. Already the luminous train of torches was streaming around the cove, toward the district officer's bungalow. The fight was moving into Torrence's front yard.

Then the big, bull-necked bulk of Harold Swain staggered up the steps.

Swain's shirt had been ripped from his back, and his fat, naked torso was smeared with blood and sweat. Yet he somehow managed to preserve his smug, thin-lipped arrogance.

"Perhaps I'm wrong," he panted, "to come to you for protection. You seem —singularly unable to—preserve order on this island."

"You brought this on yourself," said Torrence.

"I want a drink,' said Swain.

Torrence nodded to Ali, who brought a peg of whisky. Swain downed it at one gulp.

"More," he said.

"Where's Peters?" Torrence asked.

"Dead. They killed him." Swain smiled with grim satisfaction. "But he killed the old witch doctor first."

"Peters killed the *pawang*?"

Ali reappeared with a water tumbler full of whisky. Swain snatched it, tipped it up, drained it without an intervening breath. Then he said:

"The old faker came to the compound for the girl. He threatened us. Peters shot him. That started it—"

Torrence wasn't listening. He was standing at the head of the veranda stairs, watching the glittering river of torchlight that flowed up the hill. There

were hundreds of the *datu's* men swarming up the hill, piling up into a solid mass of humanity not thirty yards away.

Torrence called back to Swain: "Get out of sight and stay there!"

The torrent of men and torches continued to surge up the hill, a stream on which floated brown Malay faces, vindictive, savage faces, black velvet caps, red fezes, wisps of turbans, the gleam of *krises*, the glint of ancient gun barrels. Torrence caught sight of the yellow jacket of Datu Yussuf pushing to the front of the roaring, shifting mob. He went down the steps, faced the *datu*.

"The red-faced *tuan*," said Datu Yussuf, "you must surrender him to me."

"I cannot, *Datu*," Torrence replied quietly.

"He has mistreated my people, spilled their blood, despoiled my honor!"

"My own feelings tell me to give him to you, *Datu*," said Torrence. "But my duty forbids it. Swain will be punished —but according to my law, not yours."

"If you do not hand him over," said Datu Yussuf, "I will take him by force."

Torrence glanced back at the thin line of Sikhs. Ten rifle volleys, a few score bayonet thrusts—all to protect an arrogant pig who happened to be white!

"Then I must resist by force. I am sorry, *Datu*."

Torrence held out his hand. The *datu* shook it. Both men held on, as though somehow they could prolong by this contact the friendship that would end forever when they let go . . . .

Suddenly Torrence dropped the *datu's* hand, whipped out his revolver, wheeled!

A scream burst from within the bungalow—a prolonged wail that swelled to a shrill crescendo of pain.

Torrence dashed up the steps, nearly collided with Ali.

"The *pawang* has come back, *Tuan!*" exclaimed the wide-eyed Malay youth. "He has taken his revenge!"

Torrence pushed past Ali, entered the house. Lying on the floor was Harold Swain, doubled up, writhing in agony.

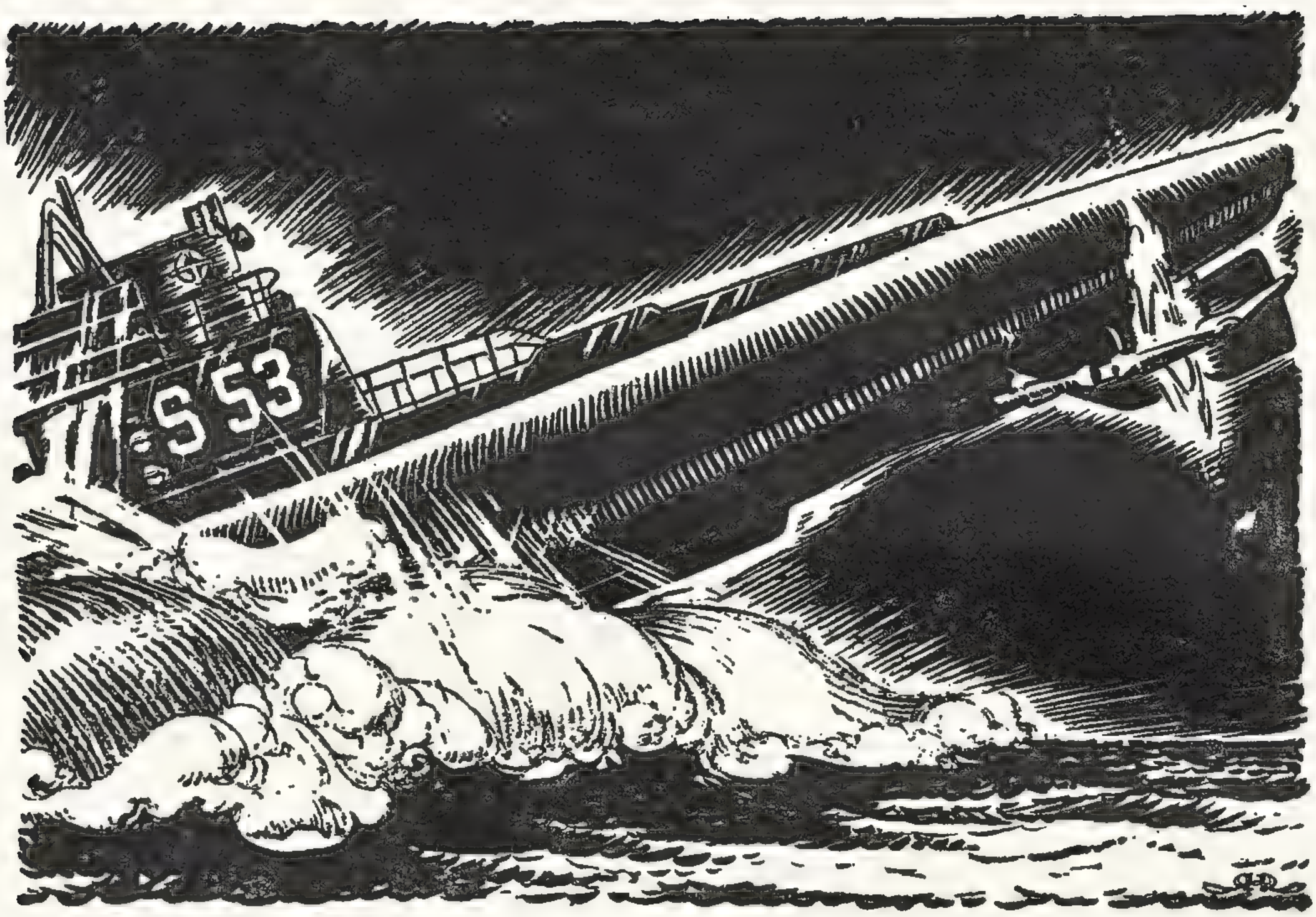
"The spirit of the *pawang* sent another snake, *Tuan*," Ali was saying. "I cut the snake to pieces—see, *Tuan*, there are the pieces on the floor—but I was too late. It had already bitten the *tuan* with the red face. He is dying!"

Part of Ali's diagnosis was right. Without speaking a word, Harold Swain died in convulsions an hour later.

The snake-bite part Torrence didn't quite believe. Of course, it was barely possible that two hatsnakes might find their way into his bungalow the same day—the second snake seeking its mate. But the hacked pieces of snake on the floor beside Swain did not impress Torrence as the quivering, nervous segments of a newly-killed reptile; they might very well have been retrieved from the dust bin. Furthermore, Torrence could find no fang marks on Swain's body.

Inasmuch as climatic conditions required immediate burial, this minor discrepancy was not apparent to the commander of the gunboat, when it finally arrived from Singapore. Furthermore, Torrence decided not to mention the matter. Neither did he call attention to the long, fresh scars in the trunk of the upas tree in his compound; nor to the fact that antiar, the poison in the sap of the upas, was soluble in alcohol; nor that Swain had, shortly before his seizure, taken two large drinks of whisky from the hands of Ali.

After all, the death of Swain had saved the lives of a good many better men. And it was highly probable that one of those men would have been the district officer. So Torrence made no effort to prove that the Malay youth with the gorgeous trousers was the self-appointed agent of the *pawang* from beyond the grave. He was content to let the onus rest upon Ali's own conscience. It would be the brown man's burden.



SUBMARINE GOLD

by COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG

Author of "On the Bottom," "Pig Boats," etc.

(Conclusion)

(Begin Here)

DISABLED, ravaged by mutiny and the elements, the gold-laden salvage ship *Lapwing* wallowed off the coast of Peru.

The greed-inspired rebellion had been suppressed, but at sore cost. Captain Philip Ramsay, leader of the expedition, had seen half of his crew perish; of the remaining men, only six could be counted on to bring back the *Lapwing* to Northern waters with the gold which had been salvaged from the sunken galleon *Santa Cruz*.

An escaped mutineer, Sorensen, an expert diver, had warned Peruvian naval authorities that the gold was being taken from their territorial waters, and the cruiser *Esmeralda* gave immediate pursuit.

Obviously ill-equipped for either fight or parley, Ramsay ordered the bullion encased in canvas bags, lashed to a cable and thrown overboard, and the *Lapwing* fled, marking the spot with buoys.

Having thus secretly jettisoned the gold, Ramsay's plan had been to escape in the low visibility, to return later, drag for the abandoned cable and heave up the treasure without even putting a man over the side in a diving rig.

But he had reckoned without the *Esmeralda's* guns. A shell crashed through the *Lapwing's* stack, injuring Ramsay and putting flight in the ship out of the question. They had to sink the boat, else their ruse would be dis-

covered and the raiding party would start searching their late anchorage.

They succeeded in scuttling the *Lapwing* before the *Esmeralda* arrived and got away in a small boat, aided by a blanketing fog. Thence, after a narrow escape from death by thirst, they made their way back to Panama, where Ramsay set about his second gamble for the bullion. He had some twenty thousand dollars left. With it he managed to charter a submarine which had been leased out for exhibition purposes. It was the old *S-53*, an abandoned model. With it, plus a crew which was pitifully inadequate in both numbers and training, he started the last race against the faster cruiser to the grave of the *Santa Cruz*.

It was indeed a desperate venture. The *S-53* had not been used for actual diving for years. With its badly worn equipment and crew Ramsay had to perform feats that would test even a new model.

After painstaking surface diving drills, Ramsay ordered the boat to submerge. Only by thorough test could he answer the question which would decide their fates. Could the *S-53*, under the surface, outwit that hostile cruiser, with her infinitely superior manpower and speed?

Then, as the pig boat slid under the water, Ramsay wheeled about from the ladder off the conning tower, paralyzed with horror. Abaft the aft periscope, through the wide open ventilation valve, the largest in the boat, the ocean was pouring into the submarine!

A few minutes later, trapped three hundred and fifteen feet under the surface, a desperate fight for life began. They had succeeded in closing off the torpedo door, curbing the in-rushing water. But would the pig boat, already subjected to terrific pressure, withstand the crushing assault of the sea—and if she did, could Ramsay build out of the inadequate supply of electricity and compressed air the tools to get them to the surface before they all perished from deadly monoxide poisoning?

Four hours later, Ramsay knew there was but one faint chance. They could not pump the water out and lighten her. The boat did not carry escape "lungs" for the crew, and even if she did, there was no surface boat within miles. The fight to the surface would have to be made where the fatal error had occurred —in the control room of the sub itself— and at a pressure which was almost suicidal.

In the face of this fact, and disregarding it, Ramsay decided on a desperate foray—to try to seal the leak from outside the boat! Fighting against time and poisoned air, working under terrific pressure, four divers headed by Ramsay, working alternately, attempted their own salvage job—to blank off the pipe leading to the flooded torpedo room— and do it from the outside!

And the first part, at least, of that gamble had succeeded—the pipe had been unbolted. Would the improvised substitute hold?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ROAD TO LIFE

FIVE P.M. Seven hours on the bottom.

In the C.O.C., each man in the *S-53's* little crew stood at his diving station, tense, silent, breathing unnaturally under the stimulation of excessive CO^2, as panting lungs strove to extract sufficient oxygen from the stale air.

Every eye was concentrated on Ramsay, standing before the high pressure air manifold, every heart fluttering unevenly as he stood ready to twist open the key to the first air bank.

The ventilation main outside was sealed off. Tom, the last man to dive, had put on that blank flange and finished that job in one dive. The valves

and air lines were all set now to put air pressure on the torpedo room and blow the water out.

But in their banks they had only air enough to expel half the water inside the boat. They couldn't count on the air to save them. And all hands had watched before when their pressure pump, unequal to the job, had to be shut down to keep it from burning out. If neither with their scanty air nor with their overloaded pump could they rid the boat of that fatal water, what hope was there? But now the captain claimed to have another way. Feebly they clung to their controls, watched dubiously.

Ramsay twisted his head, looked over his right shoulder to starboard.

"Ready, Cobb?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Start the pump!"

In went the switch on the main board, the button on the controller. Below in the pump room, the high pressure pump started to revolve, came up to speed with a whir, took suction from the torpedo room; then, as it drove the water solidly against the overload discharge, it slowed down suddenly, its note changing to a wheezing groan as the motor strove to drag the pump around.

So far, no change. The pump was doing no better. With fear in their eyes, the men listening to the laboring pump, stared at their captain. Another failure. But Ramsay, ignoring them, ordered briefly:

"O.K., Biff. Put on the air."

"Aye, aye, sir." Biff twisted the key. Again the whistling compressed air, the frosting of the manifold. For a moment the gauge on the ship's service air line, jammed in behind the manifold, fluttered, then steadied on "70" as the reducers took hold and compressed air shot through the blowing line toward the torpedo room, there to build up a pressure of seventy pounds against the suction of that laboring pump.

How would it work? Ramsay held his breath, listened. A moment passed.

Pete, at the Kingston valve levers, nearest to that hatch in the deck over the pump room, leaning far over the opening, his head cocked sidewise, his ears straining, let go his levers, with a wild leap across the deck, grasped Ramsay's hand.

"Praises be! She's takin' it!"

And she was. A ragged cheer rose from choking throats as the pump spun instantly up to normal speed, the groaning and the wheezing gone. Admiringly the crew crowded round the open hatch, peering below to make sure their ears were not deceiving them. No question. There was the pump, purring away smoothly at full speed, pushing the water overboard. As long as the juice in the batteries lasted—and there was plenty—it would keep on running that way indefinitely. For now the compressed air and the pump were working in tandem, each taking half the load of overcoming the sea pressure. With that seventy-pound air pressure pushing the water from the torpedo room into its suction, the pump itself had only to overcome the rest of that hundred forty-pound pressure of the sea against its discharge. And that it could easily do. Their difficulties were over! They had only to wait now till the water was gone, and the buoyant *S-53* would go shooting to the surface!

"Two hours yet, boys, before that water's gone! We're not up yet. Back on your stations!" Soberly Ramsay motioned them away from the pump room hatch, back to their controls. He could not rid his mind of that black gulf, yawning beneath the after half of the *S-53*. They were lightening up forward. He must keep his stern light, or they might find themselves, long before they were buoyant enough to rise, with balance destroyed, tipping backward into that void.

And so for the next hour, while the water went overboard from the torpedo room, they labored in emptying the after trimming tank, in making sure—as Ramsay suspected—that the after main ballasts had most of the air that had been blown into their tanks during their wild attempt to halt their descent by getting rid of the bilge water in the C.O.C.

An hour's hard work and the trim was set, light by the stern. And then, Biff, who had gone forward to check the bilges in the battery room, rushed back to announce that the deadlight in the torpedo room door was no longer covered with water. The room was already over half empty; he could see the waterline inside steadily falling!

ALL through the next hour, each man at his diving post—Ramsay planted squarely in front of the depth gauges, Joe and Bill on each side of him at the diving wheels, Cobb, gripping the motor controls—they waited painfully, bleared eyes on the dials, while through the silent boat echoed only the hum of the pump and the steady whine of the air blowing through into the torpedo room.

"Stand by!"

Already tense, rigid hands closed even more tightly on the controls, aching backs stiffened, drooping heads came suddenly erect.

No motion on the boat, no change on the depth gauges, but Ramsay had seen the liquid in the trim indicator move slightly. The *S-53* was starting to stir uneasily in her bed.

And then slowly, hardly perceptible at first, the stern rose a little, the depth gauge needle flickered, dropped one foot, then two, while the submarine pivoted on her bow, still buried in the mud. Ramsay heaved a sigh of relief. They were not going to tip backward. His trim was right—the stern was lifting first.

The needle on the depth gauge was slowly crawling down the scale. 313, 312, 310. The stern was lifting, you could feel that underfoot. But not the bow—they were starting to trim down by the head. 305, 300. Faster now. To the men in the boat, the choking air seemed suddenly to have grown purer. No question any longer. Their pig was going to come up!

And then the bow tore loose from the mud, shuddered, and the boat started to rise bow and stern.

They were free at last!

"Full ahead, both motors!" Ramsay shouted hoarsely. "Level off!"

But it was useless. In spite of diving planes, in spite of motors spinning full speed, the *S-53*, badly out of balance, rose with speed accelerating every foot, the ever-lightening stern giving her a steeper and steeper trim by the head.

"Catch her, Bill!" roared Ramsay to Clark at the bow diving wheel. "Get her bow up! Hard rise on those bow fins!"

"They're at full elevation now, Cap'n," muttered Bill, clinging to his wheel to avoid sliding forward. "Can't do no more!" He glanced at the big depth gauge before him. The needle there was just starting to leave the stop pin against which it had been jammed since first they sank. Only two hundred feet down now and decreasing with startling rapidity. "But why the headache, Cap'n? Any way this pig wants to come up now's O.K. with me!"

Bill was right. There was no help for it. Steeper and steeper grew the angle, faster and faster the needles on the gauges spun round toward zero, while, clinging to anything at hand—levers, periscopes, manifolds—the crew hung on.

Another moment and the *S-53*, like a glistening salmon leaping in the moonlight, shot through the surface, half her length emerging. For an intant she hung poised at a terrific angle, bow still

submerged, propellers whirling in the air; then, with a smack that rattled the teeth of her crew clutching desperately at their controls, she fell back into the sea, rocking violently as she rolled and pitched among the waves. They were up!

"Open the lid, quick, Joe!" gasped Ramsay. "Get some air in here!"

CHAPTER XIX

GOLDEN QUEST

HULL awash, only her conning tower above water to provide air for her Diesels, the *S-53* pushed cautiously on through the dusk. Ahead, a dark mass against the darkening evening sky, loomed the pinnacle of El Morro, fringed at its base by a white line of foam where the surf beating against the rocks rumbled endlessly in a monotonous symphony. To the westward, perhaps a mile or two offshore, twinkling lights and the white hull of the *Esmeralda* stood out clearly from the background of dark water.

Inside the chariot bridge of the *S-53*, jammed in between Joe Hawkins at the binnacle and Tom Williams astride the periscope shears, Lieutenant Ramsay surveyed the scene, binoculars resting on the bridge rail. Relieved, he dropped the glasses.

"They're anchored, Tom. And they're still to the westward of the island. That means, I guess, they haven't got to the *Lapwing's* hold yet, so there's still a chance for us to get in over our old anchorage on the other side."

"Think we'll have much trouble finding it, Cap'n?" asked Tom.

"Hardly," replied Ramsay. "There's those mooring buoys we left—all four of 'em. All we have to do is to steam into the middle of that ring of buoys, flood down, and we ought to hit bottom right on top of our old anchor cable and those hammocks. Our only worry'll be to come down light, so's we don't land by any chance on one of the flukes of our abandoned anchor and punch a hole in the sub. I think I'll drop the mushroom anchor on this pig and haul her down on the anchor cable, keeping the pig herself a little light."

Tom, perched in the periscope shears as lookout, scanned the waves, hardly eight feet below, which washed over the deck of the submarine, then looked ahead to that line of breakers, not over a mile off, which they were approaching at eight knots.

"Time to change course, Cap'n. Gonna head for the old anchorage?"

"Yes. Left a little, Joe, till we're in to the eastward of that rock." He leaned over the binnacle. "Steer 160°; that'll put us about half a mile clear of the island."

For nearly twenty-four hours the *S-53* had been pounding on to the southward. It had been dark when, hurtling upward from the bottom, she had broken surface and the crew had rushed through the opened conning tower hatches to swarm over the bridge and revel in the air. But only for a few minutes; then, below again, they were blowing ballasts to get in surface trim, opening hatches, thoroughly ventilating the boat, and with no pressure now to buck, getting quickly rid of the remainder of the water in the bilges and in the torpedo room.

Not half an hour after surfacing, the *S-53* was underway again, with the confined space inside of the boat a pandemonium of noise. Drainage pumps were drying out the torpedo room; fans all over the boat were whirring full blast, ridding her of foul air, of gas fumes and acid blowing from the batteries. The overloaded Diesels strained not only to drive her ahead, but also to charge the storage batteries floating on the line. Last and worst of all, the air compressor aft throbbed madly as with worn pistons

and loose bearings rattling and knocking under the load, it hammered air under pressure back into the banks to replenish the charge they had used up in rising.

On deck, Mullaney, working under the rays of a light hung from the bridge, had loosed the final three bolts on the after flange of the ventilation main, easily accessible after Ramsay had torn the pipe itself out of the ship, and was fitting on a second blank to seal off that half of the main.

By the following morning, as the *S-53* drove on over a calm sea, they had finished their repair work; Mike and Pete, having loosened the plates, had lifted out the main induction valve, and after straightening the bent stem in their lathe, reinstalled it. The *S-53* was ready to dive once more. Not till then did the exhausted crew go back to sea watches, and leaving only three men to run the boat, tumble into their bunks.

For fear now was driving Ramsay on —the fear of arriving too late, of coming on the scene to find the *Esmeralda* had discovered that the *Lapwing* was empty, had started to search elsewhere. On the bottom, as a result of Joe's mistake, they had lost another half day. In spite of his own exhaustion, in spite of the utter weariness of his crew, he dared not delay now for anything—or they might arrive to find the *Esmeralda* in their old moorings, Sorensen searching the depths for their jettisoned gold, all their sufferings in vain.

And so overwrought men and overworked machinery drove the *S-53* at top speed onward to the south until, outlined by the last rays of the setting sun, the towering pinnacle of El Morro rose above the horizon and the *S-53* went awash to cover the last few miles, with only her conning tower above the surface.

Eagerly, one at the time, the men below crowded up through the hatch to glimpse the island. Safe in the knowledge that the coast was clear for at least a few more hours, Ramsay headed for his old buoys and the grave of the *Santa Cruz*. With a little luck, only one dive of the *S-53* to the bottom there in thirty fathoms would be necessary; a few hours work and the gold would be theirs. Only one fly in the ointment. While they fled with the treasure, Don Diego was still a prisoner on the *Esmeralda*. But at least he was still alive. And once back to civilization with that four million safely his, Ramsay could imagine several means by which some of it, discreetly spread around Lima, would insure, if not Don Diego's acquittal by a court, at least his successful escape from the country before a firing squad got him.

"The rock bears west now, Cap'n," called Joe, sighting across the pelorus.

Ramsay's thoughts came back with a start to the crowded chariot bridge.

"Aye, aye. Hard left now, Joe!" Ramsay watched as the *S-53* swung slowly to port. "Steady on East a quarter North!"

The exact bearing of that wreck from the pinnacle was North 87° 23' East, but East one quarter North was close enough now; all they had to do was to pick up their old moorings, which they should hit a little over three miles offshore. Ramsay looked at his watch. From where they were as the sub swung to the new course, it would take about eighteen minutes.

CAREFULLY Ramsay laid out his program as the submarine headed east. During the night, he would center the submarine in the ring of buoys, drop anchor, and balance off the boat for submerging. At the first ray of dawn, they would seal up the boat and haul down slowly. And this time no one would forget his job—he'd check everything himself. By noon, it would be all over. With the hammocks aboard, they'd be headed north submerged, to surface about ten

miles away, well below the *Esmeralda's* horizon and then—full speed for Panama!

A tug at his shoulder. Tom was leaning over him.

"I can't spot no buoys yet, Cap'n. My eyes must be failin' me. Lend me them glasses a minute."

Casually Ramsay lifted the strap over his neck, passed the glasses to Tom, then looked at his watch. They had gone far enough.

"Stop!" he called down the voice tube.

The Diesels came to rest. The submarine, quickly losing headway, wallowed sluggishly among the waves.

"Spot one yet, Tom?" asked Ramsay.

"No. You try." Williams handed back the binoculars.

Ramsay lifted them to his eyes. While those buoys, painted in wide stripes for maximum visibility, might be a little difficult to make out in the darkness, especially from a low perch, he'd soon have them. But after several complete sweeps with the binoculars his confidence began to fade. And after an hour's search in the darkness, with the boat no longer awash but riding as high as dry ballast tanks would bring her, and with practically her whole crew on deck searching the waves, Ramsay faced the dismal truth—only a monotonous expanse of unmarked sea rolled to the eastward of El Morro. The mooring buoys, which he had counted on to show exactly his old anchorage, were gone!

"What's happened to 'em?" asked Tom. "Who'd want 'em, anyway?"

"Only that *Esmeralda,* Tom," suggested Bill Clark morosely. "It'd be just like them spigs to swipe our moorin's. They act as if they thought they owned the ocean. Ain't they cabbaged everything else around here?"

Ramsay, leaning against the forward periscope, was considering the situation. "No use wasting any more oil searching here in the darkness. Let's go and look at the *Esmeralda.*"

Awash once more, the *S-53* swung round the northern end of El Morro. Reflectively Ramsay gazed at the sky. No moon, only the myriad stars. Good. They would not have to submerge to periscope depth; with only their shadowy bridge above water they could run in silently on the electric motors and swing close enough to the *Esmeralda* to examine carefully what she was using for ground tackle.

Ahead was the quarterdeck of the *Esmeralda.* At slow speed, Diesels stopped, driving on the motors, the *S-53* sheered in toward her. Ramsay caught the reflection of a dripping hawser running from her port quarter, steered to pass a little outboard of where he estimated the mooring buoy to be.

"There she is, skipper! A little on our port bow! An' it's ours, too!" whispered Bill fiercely.

"Stop!" ordered Ramsay.

Bill was right. No mistaking that striped spar and the staunch steel bail in its end. Many a time, in the darkness and in storm, had Bill in the *Lapwing's* surfboat, tossed wildly alongside that buoy, casting loose the pelican hook in the mooring hawser.

That made it certain. No use searching further. Their moorings were gone, and with them any exact marker over where the hammocks were jettisoned. Ramsay bit his lip. Finding the old anchorage, even with range and bearings known, would not be easy.

"God, listen to 'em!" exclaimed Tom in disgust. "Music!"

Sure enough, from the *Esmeralda's* brilliantly lighted deck, the strains of *"Sobre las Olas"* floated across to them. The band was playing. Looking up, Ramsay caught the glint of gold buttons against white ducks, snatches of laughter, animated conversation.

Bill hit the rail with his clenched fist.

"All they need's a few señoritas an' it'd be a ball! Here of all places, off El Morro, right where they sunk the *Lapwing!*"

"Looks heartless enough, but it's right down our alley," remarked Ramsay. "With all that light in their eyes, they can't see out, and heaven knows, that marine band's making noise enough so they can't hear anything else. I'm going in closer. Dead slow ahead!" he ordered.

Slowly the *S-53* edged in to about a ship's length, stopped again. Ramsay lifting his glasses, whistled softly. There, near the port rail, pacing the quarter-deck, was Don Diego!

But not alone. Inboard, listening to the music, leaning negligently on a rifle, was a marine, evidently a guard.

Back and forth, back and forth, Arenda paced, pausing only occasionally to look down in the black water at a descending line fastened far below to the *Lapwing's* wreck. And then through the night came three clear strokes of the ship's bell. Nine-thirty. Unconcerned, the band played on, but the sentry, suddenly losing interest in the music, gripped his rifle. With a prod from the butt, he started Don Diego unceremoniously down a nearby hatch.

Ramsay took a deep breath. That was interesting. So Don Diego, for some period ending at three bells, was on deck under guard for exercise. He must not forget that. And then his anxious eyes, squinting through his binoculars searched the *Esmeralda* for further information.

For one thing, he could see that diving had started. From a boom rigged out over the port quarter hung a diving stage; confirming that, he spotted a wet diving suit flapping in the superstructure. He would have to move fast now. Sorensen had not yet reached the *Lapwing's* forehold. But he might in his next dive—and when he did hell would pop on the *Esmeralda!*

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On the Stands July 17th

Ace-High Detective Magazine

Ramsay dropped his glasses. He had seen enough. The band was still crashing out "Over the Waves" but the end was near.

"Slow astern," he whispered. Silently, with hardly a ripple, the *S-53* slipped away unseen into the darkness.

AN hour later, anchored for the night on the east side of El Morro, the entire crew of the *S-53* gathered in the C. O. C. for a council of war.

"What'll happen when Sorensen reports the *Lapwing's* just some junk iron is anybody's guess," stated Ramsay slowly. "My guess is that the sight of that empty hold'll send 'em right back here, where the *Lapwing* started from, four bells and a jingle!"

Pete agreed. "But when'll that be? We oughta know, so's we can make knots away from here first?"

"Tomorrow, maybe. Sorensen's made at least one dive already, probably to get that descending line secured somewhere handy to that forehold. In one more dip, he ought to be able to throw back the forecastle hatch and get through to the hold. What do you think, Tom?" asked the captain.

Tom leaned reflectively against the compass bowl.

"He might. So might any good diver if he finds things clear. But he won't, Cap'n. When I picked you off the *Lapwing's* bridge, the foc's'cle was a mess already, and just before Don Diego ordered us to abandon ship, a six-inch shell exploded somewhere for'd and made things worse. Sorensen might have a devil of a time gettin' through the wreckage to that hold, and then agin he might find a hole blasted right through the deck for him to wriggle down. You never know."

"No," broke in Bill vindictively, "but let's hope he gets himself fouled in that wreck an' chokes to death. Then we can take our time around here."

"That's a pious idea, Bill, but we can't count on it. We might as well expect the worst. And that means tomorrow for 'em to find out and let go their moorings, and the next day to come nosing back here. And without any markers, what can we do before that?"

Soberly Tom laid a hand on Bill's shoulder. "You're a bosun's mate. What about hookin' that chain right off, with a grapnel? She's laid out nice."

"Not a chance!" said Bill positively. "Without knowin' that spot exactly, we could spend a week draggin' grapnels back and forth tryin' to hook that chain, even workin' from the surface. But with the *Esmeralda* lyin' around with lots of six-inch shells handy, I guess we can't do that. And so far's I know, I never heard of any successful draggin' from a submerged pigboat, did you, Joe?" He turned to Hawkins, who, taking no part in the discussion, was absent-mindedly playing with the newly reassembled handle of the main air induction valve. No answer from Joe. Bill waited expectantly a moment, then burst out angrily:

"Joe! I'm talkin' to you! Can't you forget that thing a minute?"

"I did once," answered Joe, flushing a deep red, "but I can't again! Why rub it in?" Joe's sunken eyes looked mildly up at Bill. "Now answerin' your question, Bill. I never heard of anybody bein' able to operate a grapnel from a pig. But I got an idea myself. Listen. From the surface, even if we plot this lost anchorage again as accurately as we can from the dope on the range and bearing from that pinnacle rock, we can't hit it exactly. It might take the week you mention to hook a drag in the cable. An' if you sent down a diver, he'd waste his whole hour coverin' a little circle of the sea floor; walkin' down there's tough an' slow, and if you don't land him practically on top of that anchor cable, he'll never find it. All that's out anyway. In

the day, we can't show ourselves on the surface, and at night the diver can't see, so we're licked both ways.

"But how's this for an answer, Cap'n? Locate that spot as near as you can on the range and bearin' in the mornin', then submerge. I'll get out the gun access trunk in a divin' rig an' act as bow lookout right up in her nose. Then we cruise slow, just clear o' the bottom—an' I'll bet you my share, Cap'n, that in less'n an hour I'll spot you them hammocks!"

Ramsay looked at Joe admiringly. "A swell idea, Joe!" He turned to the rest of the crew. "The discussion's over, boys. Mike, you take the watch; the rest of you turn in and get a rest. You'll need it, seeing what's ahead tomorrow."

The worn sailors elbowed through into the battery room, and soon the *S-53* rolled sluggishly to her anchor, only a low-lying hull hardly visible except as a dark shadow on the water, quiet inside and out, the distant roar of the surf beating monotonously against its sleek steel hull.

DAWN came to find Mike Reilly ensconced in the chariot bridge, sleepily watching the first rays of the sun illuminating El Morro. Faintly he made out the breakers; near at hand, a moderate breeze was covering the waves with white-caps, washing up the rounded sides of the *S-53* and covering her slat decks with spray. Inquisitively Mike looked down on the forecastle where the divers had worked; no sign of that now. The dinghy well was again covered by the deck section, hinged down in place; the piece of ventilation pipe torn out was stowed below; the torpedo davit stood with its hook swinging idly at the davit head. Just another submarine deck, bare of everything loose, with nothing to suggest that there had been fought a desperate battle in the deep sea to save the boat.

Mike yawned, looked toward El Morro, growing clearer in the breaking day. In the lee of the island lay the *Esmeralda,* her hull invisible but her towering topmasts rising incongruously above the palms covering most of the low-lying island. It was time for the *S-53* to vanish from the surface. The stars were fading. No one could tell when for some purpose a sailor might go aloft on the cruiser and sight them across the island in the growing light. Reilly squeezed down the hatch to rouse the crew.

In a few minutes, the C. O. C. was alive again with men, quiet at their diving stations. Open Kingston valves, the whistling of air out the vents, showed that the boat was flooding down, but only to her awash position. When finally Tom reported the ballasts flooded and the vents closed off, the *S-53* lay with hull submerged, her conning tower still above the surface, and her safety tank still empty. When that was flooded, she would submerge completely.

Nervously the crew watched as Ramsay went from station to station, checking. They had been awash several times, but this would be the second real dive for the cruise and the first since their unfortunate experiment three hundred miles to the northward. Swiftly Ramsay strode through the boat. No hurry now in submerging; he would take no chances. He checked off. Hatches closed. Mufflers on the Diesels closed. Compartment ventilation valves closed. In the torpedo room, damp and dirty after its unexpected flooding, he made sure every torpedo tube door was closed, inner and outer. Back at last in the C. O. C., he gripped the lever on the main air induction valve. That was closed. This time, Joe, visibly squirming as every eye in the room followed Ramsay in that gesture, had not forgotten. And then Ramsay paused before the air bank manifold, scanned the high pressure gauges. 1790, 1800, 1800, 1800. The air banks were up as high as their worn

compressor could get them; he wondered if it would hang together long enough to do that job again. He clenched his teeth. No more accidents and they wouldn't have to.

And finally he turned to Cobb.

"How're the batteries, Sparks?"

"They're up, Cap'n. We didn't use much on the bottom, an' that float charge they got yesterday brought 'em back."

"We're going to need all they've got, so watch 'em." He looked around. It was time to go. Must be nearly light on the surface.

"All right, Pete; flood the safety tank."

Mullaney jerked back the last Kingston lever to line up inboard with the others. In the silent boat, they heard the water rushing through the duct keel into the tank while the air gurgled out. Slowly the boat started to sink.

Around the C. O. C., anxious men watched the gauges, fingers nervously clutching their controls, ready this time to put on the air in a split second, blow the tanks, lighten up, in case something should still be wrong.

But smoothly and calmly the submarine settled while the safety tank flooded, and then as the whistle of escaping air died away, came gently to a stop. Ramsay looked at the depth gauges, then at the trim indicator. Conning tower still a foot out of water, half a degree trim by the head. The submarine was too light yet to sink.

"Half a ton more water in the adjusting tank, Pete," called out the captain.

"Aye, aye, sor!" Pete opened a small sea valve; water started to rise on the scale in the little adjusting tank until it showed 1000 pounds higher. Slowly the *S-53* sank completely beneath the surface.

"Enough!" ordered Ramsay crisply. Pete closed the valve while the boat continued to settle.

"Slow ahead, both motors! Hold her at periscope depth!" The motors started to whir, diving wheels spun and the *S-53* leveled off, swimming smoothly.

But they were now a little heavy. Ramsay preferred to be light, to hold her down with the planes. Once more he called to Pete.

"Pump over two hundred pounds, Pete, but carefully now!"

Satisfied at last with the balance, he turned to the periscope. It was getting light enough to see. He pressed the button, ran the periscope up, while Tom brought the boat around to the course. Rotating the periscope and adjusting it to look dead aft, he conned the ship while it ran out, veering a little to port, until with the pinnacle dead aft as sighted through his eyepiece, Tom reported steady on the course.

And now for distance. Sixty-one hundred yards North 87°23′ East was where the *Lapwing* had moored over the *Santa Cruz*. A periscope range finder is not the best in the world for accuracy, but there was nothing else. As best he could, sighting on El Morro Ramsay held the course, running dead slow, until the range showed sixty-one hundred yards; then he sang sharply:

"Stop! Let go!"

Cobb stopped the motors. Forward, Biff released the mushroom anchor. The bow, relieved of the weight, lifted a bit; the submarine, its headway lost, no longer held down by the action of the sea on the diving fins, floated gently up until the top of the conning tower bobbed out of water. The anchor hit bottom, the boat surged slightly ahead on it.

"Good enough," muttered Ramsay, half to himself. "Now to haul down." He pressed his lips to the voice tube to the torpedo room, where Biff was standing by the anchor windlass, punched the bell, "All right, Biff, heave around slow!"

A tug forward, as the slack wire took up, then the delicately balanced boat dropped a trifle by the nose and started

to sink, as the wire anchor cable wound in on the drum forward and pulled the still buoyant boat down to the anchor buried in the mud, thirty fathoms below.

THEIR second dive. How different from their headlong plunge on the first! Complacently the crew in the C. O. C. watched as the anchor windlass hauled them down, and foot by foot, the depth gauge needles registered their slow descent. Five minutes it took to haul down the first hundred feet; a little faster she sank after that but not much, as the pressure of the sea, pressing in on the submarine's hull, shrank her slightly, decreasing her positive buoyancy a little. One hundred and seventy feet on the depth gauge, practically on the bottom. Ramsay signaled Biff to stop heaving.

Stern high, with a moderate slope to her deck, the *S-53* swung to her mushroom anchor. Somewhere nearby lay the remnants of the *Santa Cruz*.

"All right, Joe. Get your rig on."

Joe nodded, left the after diving wheel. Under the practised hands of Tom and Bill, his diving suit went swiftly on; he was soon arrayed save for his helmet. Ramsay looked at him critically.

"Hang a couple more weights on his belt, Tom. I want him heavy, so he won't sweep overboard. We're going to be underway."

"Aye, aye, sir." Tom strapped on twenty pounds of lead, while Bill, lifting the helmet, tested out both air and telephone.

"Now about your tender, Joe," cautioned Ramsay. "Bill'll go with you into the gun access trunk and stay with his head behind that curtain bulkhead in the air bubble to tend your lines. He won't have a telephone, but he'll "fish" your lines and you signal to him just what you want."

"Why bother, Cap'n?" asked Joe. "It'll just waste Bill's dive. All I do is walk for'd on the deck, hang on, and walk back afterwards. I don't need no tender this dive. Save Bill till we've spotted them hammocks. There'll be plenty to do then."

Reluctantly Ramsay gave way on the tender question and motioned to Bill.

Joe's helmet was locked in place, the airhose and lifeline quickly secured to his breastplate. Painfully staggering under his excessive weights, he climbed the ladder, locked himself through the gun access trunk, and came out on deck.

Curiously Joe looked out, as he plodded slowly through the water toward the bow. Many a dive he had stood on the bottom, there in thirty fathoms, working first on the decaying hulk of the *Santa Cruz*, then crawling through the mud toward that strongroom which centuries of immersion had buried beneath the ocean floor. This pressure he was used to. And on the deck of the *S-53*, it was even a little less. Before him the deck narrowed down, began to taper toward the bullnose. Far forward on the stem he lay down, gripped the towing hawser tightly and sang out into his telephone receiver:

"All right, Mr. Ramsay!"

Through the roar of air blowing into his helmet, Joe caught in the receivers strapped over his ears, the answer:

"O. K., Joe! Keep a bright eye out now."

Joe, flat on his stomach, pushed his helmet out over the bullnose. Below him the sharp stem of the submarine curved away through the water to the forefoot; a few feet down was the dark bottom, ooze and sand. He heard through the water the grinding of the anchor cable; somewhere inside the anchor was being hoisted. But now instead of the anchor coming up, the nose of the submarine, floating almost weightless in the water, came down into the mud.

And then far aft the screws began to turn. Joe watched the bow diving fins below him slowly revolving upward. Against his helmet, sweeping past his

suit, he felt the rush of water as the *S-53* drove slowly ahead.

"Lucky I'm lyin' down," muttered Joe, clinging tightly to the bullnose. "Standin' up, all hell wouldn't hold me against this current now!"

Straining his eyes for the slightest sign of anything differing from the monotony of ocean floor, Joe hung on. Fifty feet was about his range of visibility in the sand. Beyond that, everything faded out in the translucent water.

THE minutes went by. Uncomfortably Joe noted a thin trickle of water streaming in his exhaust valve, filling the bottom of his helmet, obscuring his faceplate. He tilted back a little to let the water run down his suit, then found that with more area exposed to the sea swirling by, it was harder to hang on. But there was no help for it.

A voice in his ears. Captain Ramsay.

"Seen anything yet, Joe?"

Joe pushed his mouth against his transmitter, roared out:

"No!"

"Stand by, then; we're changing course!"

Beneath him, Joe felt the submarine heel as it turned; then come gently back to level. He riveted his eyes on the mud.

So, back and forth, crisscrossing in every direction, a few hundred yards one way, a slow turn, then a hundred yards another, the *S-53* searched over the site of the *Lapwing's* anchorage. The minutes dragged on. Each time, before the course was changed, in response to the unvarying question, he sent back the unvarying answer:

"No!"

Disheartened, Joe gazed at the mud. Just the remains of fish, raining down there for millions of years. As for that anchor cable which the *Lapwing* had slipped, perhaps it had sunk out of sight in the ooze. Not a sign of it anywhere. The pull of the current against his helmet eased. They must be slowing down. And then in his ears he heard:

"Your hour's up, Joe! We're stopping a minute. Come on in!"

Still clutching the towing wire stopped to the deck, Joe crawled backward, afraid every minute of slipping overboard, until where the deck widened, he stood erect and started slowly aft. Discouraged, he plodded along the deck, carefully clearing his lines as he went, his suit full of water up to his chest. Not a thing had he sighted. And judging from all the changes of direction, the ground had been thoroughly covered.

Ahead of him rose the conning tower, a dark island against the gray water. Just before it was the open hatch of the gun access trunk, yawning wide to take him back to a world of men. He stopped, started to drag up his lines, to coil them down and thrust them through the open hatch ahead of him. It was a tough job. With no tender in that trunk to take up the slack as he came aft, he had a hundred feet of lifeline and hose there on deck to coil down. He stooped, went at it methodically, turn on turn building up the helix of hose. But the heap of hose, growing too high, became suddenly unbalanced and in a tangle of loose coils collapsed and slid away under the low rail.

"Damn!" Joe lunged for the lines, caught the toe of his left boot in the projecting ammunition hoist, lost his balance—and with arms clutching futilely for a hold on the smooth sides of the submarine, shot overboard!

Heavily he hit the bottom, face down. His helmet half buried itself in the mud, and instantly for Joe the light went out. In utter blackness, he clawed wildly a moment to regain his balance; then, choking from the water inside his suit, which had all run into his helmet, he twisted partly, thrust his helmet up, and to his infinite relief, brought his head out of the mud, where the water promptly washed his faceplate clean.

Dazed, he sat a moment, looked out the top port of his helmet. Almost overhead, the huge cylindrical bulk of the *S-53* floated, drifting lazily away from him. Already he could see the snarled coils of his airhose slowly untangling in the water, lengthening out. That sight brought him to with a jerk. He must chase that submarine, and get back aboard at once. If the sub drifted too far before he caught up with it, his lifelines might part, leaving him there to strangle.

Violently he shoved both hands into the mud, striving to rise. Instantly a set of jagged teeth closed around his left hand; he felt his flesh begin to tear. What had him? In terror he drew his diving knife with his right hand, poised it for a blow, jerked his left, those terrible jaws still clinging to his wrist, out of the mud. With an oath, Joe paused in the middle of the blow, almost stupefied. What *was* the inert mass enclosing his left hand? No sea reptile, anyway. With his knife, he rubbed the mud from it, looked through the murky water incredulously. A tomato can. He felt hastily round him in the mud. The whole bottom of the ocean there was paved with tin cans!

JOE HAWKINS quit trying to rise. The *S-53* was fifty feet away now and drifting farther, but all desire on Joe's part to chase her suddenly vanished. He was sitting on the bottom, where for weeks the *Lapwing* had been anchored!

Joe felt his lines drawing taut. Soon, willy-nilly, when all his slack was gone, he was going to move. Disregarding the jagged top of the can into which his hand was jammed, he thrust his mouth against his transmitter, shrieked out:

"Submarine! Drop anchor, quick! Never mind why! Let go the anchor!"

To Joe's vast relief, almost immediately he saw the mushroom anchor drop from under the *S-53's* forefoot and send up a cloud of mud which for a moment almost hid the bow. And then the submarine pivoted, swinging to her anchor, while the current pressed her broadside until she ended by heading toward him, a vast monster swimming gently along the ocean floor.

Not until then did Joe rise. Scarce daring to breathe lest he cut his suit on the ragged tin cans all about him, he carefully worked himself erect. Through his receivers, he caught Ramsay's agonized voice. He should have answered before.

"Yeah. I'm O. K. Cap'n. Fell overboard, that's all. But I found our old anchorage! How do I know? From the tin cans we heaved over from the *Lapwing's* galley. The ocean's covered with 'em here. But for God's sake don't lift that mudhook now. About ten feet from where I'm standin', I can see what looks like a string of sausages, sorta covered with mud—sausages stuffed with gold!" Joe paused for breath, panting from his efforts to talk under so much pressure, then resumed briefly. "Just a minute until I mark this spot so I can find it again and then I'm comin' aboard!"

With a beating heart, Joe plodded a few steps to his left, stooped, felt in the mud. No question, there was one hammock under a thin layer of mud; ahead and behind he could vaguely make out the outlines of the others. He was straddling the treasure of the *Santa Cruz!* But how to mark the spot? There was nothing in sight but mud—dark,

formless, stretching away in all directions, fading into the water, one spot on that sea floor undistinguishable from the next.

He should plant a pole. But in the depths there were none. He reflected. What was it those explorers in the Arctic were always building so the rescue parties could trail them? Heaps of stones—cairns, they called them. But in that mud there were no stones, no coral, either, that deep down. But there *was* something!

Vigorously Joe started digging in the mud where he had fallen, and soon there stood over that string of gold-laden hammocks a first class cairn, all of muddy cans! And plodding away over the ocean floor, a stream of fine bubbles funneling upward from his helmet, a cloud of mud in the water trailing after him like dust along a dry country road, Joe breasted the sea in a queer slow walk, headed back for the *S-53*.

CHAPTER XX

DEATH ON DECK

IN the fading twilight, an incongruous assortment of men and officers leaned over the *Esmeralda's* rail, anxiously watching the water just off the port quarter. In huge clusters, expanding as they rose, bubbles were foaming upward. In the midst of the group at the rail, fingering a wet hose and a dripping lifeline, was Dago Pete, his bare feet braced on the wet deck.

"Da time now, Jenks? How she go?"

Jenks, timing decompression, looked at the rudely scribbled table of stops in his hand, then at a watch dangling from a lanyard round his neck.

"Two minutes. If Nils don't fetch the bloody ingots this time, Gor help 'im!"

Anxiously Teniente Sanchez listened, staying a few feet aft to keep from fouling his spotless white uniform on those animals. A few days before they had come aboard, emaciated and feverish, weak from starvation, half-crazy from a one-sided battle with the insects, their hatred for Sorensen smothered only by their desire for food for their tortured bodies. And there they were now, tending him, as below in the water, Sorensen was dangling, decompressing at the ten foot stage, his last stop before he came aboard. It was growing dark.

Uneasily Sanchez considered. This was Sorensen's second dive for the day, forced on him against his vigorous protests. What was the result of it? They had no diving telephone. Until Sorensen came aboard, who knew?

For Teniente Sanchez, things were not going so well. For himself, he was perfectly willing to concede that in two hundred and ten feet of water, two dives in one day were too much for any man. But in the face of that radio message which the captain had flashed on him just after lunch, what else could he do?

In Lima, the Minister of Marine was losing patience. Originally the *Esmeralda* was to have been back in a day or two with the *Lapwing* seized and an untold fortune in bullion in her possession. With the *Lapwing* scuttled, matters were naturally delayed somewhat; but confidently, based on Sorensen's promises, he had reported that after one day's work the flow of gold would start, that in a few days they would return with the bullion aboard.

Instead, what had happened? First, time wasted on more moorings. Then that disheartening report, after an hour's work on the bottom, that the wreckage of the shattered bridge lay across the forecastle hatch, barring all access till it was cleared away. And then three aggravating days, while Sorensen toiled with sledge and crowbar, struggling under that deadening pressure, and each day brought Teniente Sanchez a hotter session with his captain over a new radio from Lima, each message more strong than its predecessor.

And today, that last one. Peremptory, incisive. Either some of the gold on deck that day, or the cruiser to start home.

And so Sorensen, who finally had planted a small charge of T. N. T. on his morning's dive to clear away the remaining wreckage, had finally agreed to make a second dive late in the afternoon. If it were humanly possible, he was to crawl through to the forehold and bring up at least one bar of gold.

Fidgeting nervously, Sanchez waited as Jenks watched the slow seconds tick, and Dago Pete gripped the lifelines.

"Time!" called Jenks. "Up with the bloomin' styge!"

Sanchez motioned to his bosun's mate; a winch began to revolve. In came the diving lines, hauled over the side by Dago Pete, coiled down behind him by Francisco. Behind them clustered the dressers, the other seamen rescued from El Morro, waiting to tackle the diver. Sanchez' eyes, sweeping outboard, paused on them an instant.

"Scum!" Soon he would be rid of those derelicts, each with the thousand *soles* promised him, unceremoniously dumped on the quay in Callao the moment they returned. That is, provided—

Sanchez turned his overwrought face to the rail. Sorensen's helmet was just breaking the surface. Slowly the diver rose above the waves; one arm appeared, clinging to the steel bail of the stage for support; then his suit emerged, with the canvas suddenly ballooning out as the water pressure vanished. Sanchez eagerly looked for the other arm. Was it clutching that promised ingot? No, Sorensen was merely fumbling with it over his left breast for his control valve. Disappointed, Sanchez dropped his eyes, waited for the steel stage to appear. After all, the ingot was heavy; Sorensen would naturally lash it to the stage, not hold it during that slow two-hour rise for decompression.

In a swirl of foam, the little stage broke from the water, swaying and rotating as it rose above the surface. Clutching the rail, Sanchez leaned far over, scanned the tiny grating feverishly. But except for Sorensen's bulky lead-soled shoes, it was bare. Sorensen had brought up nothing.

SANCHEZ let go the rail, beckoned the bosun's mate, spoke savagely in Spanish.

"Take the first and the second motor launches there at the boat boom. Unmoor! *Pronto!* Pass the word on the forecastle and below to stand by to get underway. And then hoist in all the boats except one motor launch. I will have need for that for one trip to El Morro, then that too you will hoist in. *Vaya!*"

The diving stage swung in over the rail and was dropped on deck. The *Esmeralda*, resounding to the clear notes of the bugle and the shrill whistling of bosun's pipes, came suddenly alive. The two launches shot out from the starboard boat boom, plowed from one buoy to another, letting go mooring hawsers.

Sorensen, completely hidden in a circle of dressers, barely free of his diving rig, burst excitedly through the ring of tenders, and looked wildly for Sanchez. Seeing him near the flagstaff, he ran aft to him, clad only in his diving underwear.

"Teniente!"

Sanchez looked at him coldly.

"Your last chance, that dive! I told you not to come up till you got into that hold!" He started to turn away.

Pale, strained, Sorensen gripped his arm, stopped him.

"Vait! It ban tough yob, but Ay do it! Ay got into dat hold!"

Unbelievingly Sanchez looked at him.

"So, Señor Sorensen? Where then is the ingot to prove it? Lost on the way up?"

"No." Sorensen, shivering, fixed his blue eyes on the incredulous lieutenant before him, muttered, "Dat room, she

ban empty now! Not a single ingot left."

"What? Empty!" Almost livid, Sanchez stared at him. So there was no gold after all! Like a fool, he had swallowed the story of this castaway, on the strength of it sunk an innocent American ship on the high seas. He gulped as he visualized the implications.

"Yah! She ban empty, all right. You know vat happened? Ay tal you. Dat Mr. Ramsay, he ban bad feller to lick. You geef heem an hour, you remember? While you vait to get ready your boats, he heave ofer dat gold. Ay tole you den not to vait, to grab dat *Lapwing!* Now he make you look lak fool!"

An evil gleam came into Sanchez' dark eyes. Others in Lima would think the same, no doubt. But at least this squarehead sailor was not going to be there to confirm their suspicions. He looked over the rail. In the quickly gathering dusk, he made out his last motor boat returning to the ship. The final mooring was free; already they were heaving short. He turned back to face Sorensen, who in his excitement had failed to note the expression in Sanchez' eyes.

"Yah! You ban fool to vait. Now ve must go back vere before she ban anchored an' Ay dive for dose ingots. Only now, in dat mud, it tak me long time."

"*Si*, a long time." Rapidly Sanchez thought it over. Was Sorensen lying? He began to doubt the very existence of the treasure. Even if it once existed, further search was now useless. There was that flat order to return. He could not get around that.

Even if he wished to try, was it wise? Perhaps those ingots had spilled out into the sea during the *Lapwing's* mad flight, and were now scattered in the mud along her path. If so, it was plain idiocy to search for them. But even if that were not so, and Ramsay had tricked him, heaved the gold overboard as Sorensen thought, where should they go to look for it? Without giving it a second thought, he had taken up the *Lapwing's* moorings. Except that the spot lay somewhere on the other side of that island, he didn't know where the *Lapwing* had been moored. Without that information, search was hopeless. Did Sorensen know?

"So you will go back and search in the mud now for the gold?" Skeptically Sanchez eyed him. "You know of course just where to dive? You have the exact location, the ranges and the bearings from that rock perhaps? *Si?*"

Slowly, as that sank in, Sorensen began to wilt. Better than anyone else, he, a diver, knew what it meant to search aimlessly in the mud. Those markers! His knees shook. At his suggestion the *Esmeralda* herself had taken them up. Now he could not say within a mile where the *Lapwing* had been anchored. And for one diver to search a square mile of muddy ocean bottom thirty fathoms deep—it was impossible.

"So? You do not know? I thought so." Sanchez looked forward. Night had fallen. In the darkness, he could see clouds of smoke rolling from the funnels. The black gang must be nearly ready to steam. He strode to the starboard gangway, looked down. There lay the motor boat he had ordered, the coxswain waiting expectantly.

Sanchez beckoned the officer of the deck, gave a brief order in Spanish.

"A squad of marines. *Pronto!*"

Sorensen, alarmed, watched as with bayonets fixed, eight marines lined up against the black muzzle of the after six-inch gun.

"Señor Sorensen, the boat is waiting for you! *Adios!*"

Uncomprehending, Sorensen looked dully at him.

"*Si, Señor,* your boat!" snapped out Sanchez, his black eyes now cold. "Under orders, we sail for Callao immediately, where I must, no doubt, explain to a court-martial what I have done off El Morro. But for you, *Señor,* you need

much time yet to find that treasure. So I leave you with your shipmates on El Morro to search for it!" He shrugged his shoulders, looking at the scattered diving equipment around the dressing bench. "You may take with you to the island your diving rig. Get in!"

"Matey!"

Sorensen felt a tug at his arm. Little Jenks, his Cockney face pallid with terror, was looking up at him.

"Matey, does that bloke mean 'e's puttin' us on the beach again?"

Sorensen nodded hopelessly.

Jenks' voice suddenly hardened and he gripped Sorensen's arm.

"So once again we're bein' marooned account o' you, Nils Sorensen! I warn you—get that bloke to tyke us along with 'im, or it won't be the mosquitos an' the fever that'll carry *you* off on El Morro!"

PANIC-STRICKEN, Sorensen saw Dago Pete furtively extract a diving knife from its sheath and thrust the knife into his canvas trousers. Ominous. And no use appealing for mercy. Sanchez, facing trouble himself, was vindictively set on squaring accounts with the man who had dragged him into it.

Wildly Sorensen looked about. With renewed hope, his eye lighted on Don Diego Arenda, just coming on deck. There was his way out!

"*Teniente!*" Sorensen grasped Sanchez by the arms, swung him about. "Arenda! Make heem tal us! He knows vat he did vith dat gold."

Sanchez looked speculatively at Arenda. There was something in what Sorensen was saying. If Arenda would talk, something might yet be done, both in Lima and on the salvage job.

"*Muy bien,* we shall see." Followed by Sorensen, he walked briskly aft to where between his sentry and the waterway, Arenda had commenced his walk.

"*Señor!*" Sanchez stepped directly into Arenda's path. Don Diego, of necessity, paused and looked coldly at him. "*Señor,*" continued Sanchez, "this diver has today entered the *Lapwing*, only to find her empty. What did you do with your cargo of ingots?"

Arenda looked at Sanchez with a flicker of amusement on his dark face. So at last they had discovered it! *Bueno.* Much good the knowledge would do them now. For a long while, resigned to death himself, Don Diego had eaten his heart out looking forward with fear and trembling to this day. He had failed to scuttle the *Lapwing* beyond diving depth; when her emptiness was discovered, the *Esmeralda* had only to go back to the *Lapwing's* anchorage and fish up the gold. And then suddenly he was no longer concerned. Fool! How he had laughed the day Sanchez had himself pulled up the *Lapwing's* moorings, and destroyed all traces of where she had been working. For himself, he could die in peace now. Some day Ramsay could return when this gold-laced idiot was gone and repossess himself of the treasure of the *Santa Cruz.*

Well, now it was over. Why should, he, a captain, bother with this upstart lieutenant? Even as a prisoner, he would answer only to his seniors in rank. Arenda, his path aft blocked, faced about and started to walk forward.

Sanchez, enraged, grasped his shoulder, twisted him inboard.

"That gold, *Señor,* what did you do with it?"

Arenda shrugged his shoulders.

"Gold? What gold? Who ever said there was in the *Lapwing* any gold? I? No. *El* Capitán Ramsay? A thousand times, no! Who then? This man?" With contempt, Don Diego turned to Sorensen. "Ramsay, he warned you, this man is a deserter, a murderer! And you think he speaks the truth? *Muy bien,* believe

him then!" Arenda jerked himself free, took a step forward.

Livid, Sorensen sprang toward him, the fear of El Morro obliterating everything else from his mind.

"Yah, dat gold! You know it vas in dat hold! You heave it overboard!" Nils shook his fist in Arenda's face. Unless he got that information, he was done for. "Vere vas it the *Lapving* vas anchored? You tal, or Ay keel you!"

Unperturbed, Arenda looked at Sanchez, said:

"*Teniente,* take away this man, or send me below. I am a captain. I will not listen to insults from seamen."

Sanchez glared at him. Evidently Arenda was not to be bribed or bullied into talking. He was only wasting time. He motioned the sentry to take Sorensen away.

But Sorensen, his last hope fading, went berserk. Arenda would not talk? He shoved aside the marine, lashed savagely out at the slight figure before him.

Arenda ducked, but too late. Sorensen's wet knuckles caught him on the right cheek, laid it open to the bone, sent him, dazed and bleeding, spinning across the deck. He slid through a puddle of water, brought up finally clinging to Sorensen's discarded lead belt.

For an instant Don Diego lay open-mouthed; then his clawing fingers moved instinctively over the familiar lead weights until they came to a bronze sheath. Looking up through a red blur, Don Diego saw Sorensen, leaving his torn shirt in the struggling sentry's hands, break away again, leap for him, gnarled hands taloned toward his throat. Like a flash, Arenda jerked the diving knife from its sheath; as the enraged sailor hurtled down on him, he drove it squarely into Sorensen's naked breast!

Face up, the bronze hilt of the diving knife protruding from his bared ribs, Sorensen rolled lifeless on the deck. Pale and startled at this unexpected turn, Sanchez stared at him a moment, then ordered:

"Toss that carrion overboard!"

The marines seized the limp figure, carried it to the rail. A heavy splash, and Nils Sorensen was gone. With a shrug, Sanchez turned from the side. Perhaps it was better so. One less witness to dispute his version of what had happened on the *Lapwing*. But before him still were those tenders, Sorensen's shipmates. A brusk wave toward the side ladder, and the marines herded them at the points of their bayonets toward the gangway and down the ladder. Sanchez, looking down into the boat, counted. Rapidly he spoke to the coxswain.

"Throw those beachcombers off into the surf and return, *prontissimo!* And do not hazard the boat by getting in too close in the darkness to the breakers. Let them swim! *Vaya!*"

The executive officer straightened up. *Muy bien!* He was rid of all those vermin now. He adjusted his shoulder marks a trifle, turned inboard. There, staring dazedly down at a pool of blood at his feet, was Don Diego. Sanchez motioned the sentry to take him below, then himself started for the captain's cabin to report to the commanding officer that all diving was over and that immediately they would weigh anchor, and return to Callao with their prisoner.

CHAPTER XXI

LAST FORAY

TOM WILLIAMS, one hand on the winch of the torpedo davit, the other on the manila line running down the side of the *S-53*, waited with a pounding heart for the signal to heave around. Somewhere in the mud below was Bill Clark, groping with the other end of that line for the next hammock.

On the topside in the world above,

the sun must be about setting. Tom, panting for breath after winching up the last hammock, could plainly tell that. Only a few faint rays of light were filtering now through that thirty-fathom blanket of water pressing him down; it was getting so dark he could hardly make out those eleven hammocks laid out side by side between him and the gun access trunk on the wide gun platform. And down where Bill was fumbling to lash on the twelfth hammock, it was probably completely dark. He stared out his faceplate at the manila line, dissolving in the water almost before it got to the rail.

The wavering line suddenly jerked in his fingers. The signal to heave in. Both hands on the winch handle, Tom labored. Thank God, that would be the last one! He groaned as his heart, under the tremendous pressure, throbbed unnaturally. With a muffled clanking, the hammock dragged its muddy trail through the water and up the *S-53's* side, to swing at last at the davit head. Tom let go the handle, grabbed the boom, and rotated the crane inboard. Unlocking the ratchet, he lowered the ungainly canvas to the deck, just as Bill, looking ten feet high through the water, climbed hand over hand up his lifeline and dragged himself over the bow railing.

Tom pointed to the hammocks; Bill slapped him on the helmet in acknowledgment. Silently, thoroughly, the two divers began lashing the hammocks down to the deck. That done, they clambered through the open hatch into the gun access trunk, slamming the lid after them. The job on the bottom was all done. And as they reported themselves inside and started decompression, they heard the whining of the mushroom anchor cable coming in and felt the motors turning over; through the deadlights in the side of the trunk, indistinctively they made out the water moving by. The *S-53* was planing upward.

Ten minutes later, invisible in the growing darkness, the submarine burst through the surface, rolling sluggishly in the trough of the sea.

But as the deck cleared the waves, the hatch from the battery room was flung violently back; Ramsay shot up on the superstructure and bent over the row of mud-covered hammocks, counting.

"Twelve! We got 'em all!" Exultantly he turned to Biff, who was manning the winch on the torpedo davit.

"O.K., Biff. Down the hatch!" He motioned to Doggy and Pete, who had just scrambled up alongside him. "Shake a leg, now! Feed these hammocks to Biff there, at the winch!"

They made swift work of it. Half an hour and the slimy hammocks, still unopened, stretched out in a wide row in

the battery room, with little rivulets of mud and water trickling over the canvas-covered deck. In awe, Biff gazed at the hammocks, bulging shapelessly between the taut lashings.

"Four million berries inside this pig now, Pete! If I was skipper, I'd beach the boat right away before she can sink on us, an' I'd be damned if I stirred again till I'd called the whole Pacific Fleet down here to escort me home!"

The hoarse note of the klaxons screamed through the boat. Diving stations! What, dive again? Puzzled, Biff started to run aft. At the worst, all they had to do now was to start the Diesels, slip away in the darkness to the north and it was all over.

"Silence in the boat!"

Biff, about to protest any further diving, choked back his words, sprang to his post at the air manifold.

"Flood!"

And in a few minutes, only her conning tower awash, the *S-53* was moving slowly westward, while a whisper went round the crew that the skipper was going to try to get aboard the *Esmeralda* and rescue Don Diego!

ON the chariot bridge, with Joe steering by his side, Ramsay looked anxiously ahead. A couple of miles offshore on the westward side was the *Esmeralda*. And if they had the band blaring away again on her quarterdeck, if Arenda were up for exercise and his sentry were as careless as the night before, it seemed to Ramsay that he could slip close in the darkness, swim over to the cruiser's low stern, and get Don Diego's attention. A leap overboard for Don Diego, and both of them could cover the distance to the conning tower, crawl in, and hidden by the night, get away without the *Esmeralda's* crew ever knowing really what had happened.

Ramsay stared into the darkness as they cleared the headland. A desperate chance to take? Yes, but Arenda had taken a worse one for his sake. And this might work. The Peruvians would never suspect that there was another vessel within a hundred miles; they would be watching for nothing. The very boldness of his plan was in its favor. And he was as well prepared for it as ever any trench raiding party on the Western Front. The shadowy pinnacle was slipping aft past the port quarter. Ahead he spotted the lights of the *Esmeralda*. Five minutes more and they would be there. Ramsay began to remove his trousers to make swimming easier. And then Joe grabbed his shoulder excitedly.

"Cap'n! She's gettin' underway!"

Ramsay seized his night glasses, hurriedly peered through them.

No question; diving was over on the *Esmeralda*. The mooring hawsers were in, she would soon be underway. If they were to rescue Don Diego, it was now or never. Feverishly he scanned the quarterdeck. It was deserted. All the deck force, all the officers on watch were either on the bridge or clustered amidships under the brilliant circle of cargo lights round the boat crane. But out the after ports and over the low railing of the stern walk, came a dim glow from the admiral's cabin, where according to his information, Arenda was a prisoner.

"We're in luck, Joe, but only if we shake a leg. We've caught 'em when they're all occupied on deck with that boat! No one's aft, the quarterdeck's dark, and there's noise enough from that crane to drown out anything. So edge in a little closer than we figured before."

And then as Joe swung the slowing submarine broadside across the stern of the *Esmeralda* so that she came to rest not more than fifty yards away. Ramsay leaned over the tube and called down:

"Stand by below for a quick dive!"

Turning to Joe, he cast a last look around inside the darkened chariot bridge and warned:

"Ready now with that life ring and a boat hook when we come back. Arenda may need 'em. And you've got that flashlight?"

"Aye, aye, Cap'n. Everything set!"

Ramsay slid along the inside of the chariot bridge, his body completely blackened. Around his waist in a nar-

row belt was a bottle of graphite paste and grease for blackening Arenda for the return trip. And around his waist above the belt were two fathoms of small stuff with a small steel hook spliced to one end.

Silently Ramsay slipped out the after end of the bridge and down a few steps into the water.

FOR Ramsay, it was an easy swim. Eyes smarting slightly from the warm salt water, he sped forward over that fifty yards of water and in a few minutes was rubbing the slightly mossy band of boot-topping bordering the *Esmeralda's* waterline.

Forward, up the starboard side, Ramsay heard staccato orders, excited commands as the crane hook swung over the boat, the thumping of the launch against the side, and the jabbering cries of the coxswain as his seamen struggled to grip the heavy hook and engage it in the ring of the boat slings.

He must hurry. Carefully Ramsay unwound the line from his waist, flung the hooked end upward over the stern walk, then heaved down on his end.

"Lucky shot!" muttered Ramsay. "It caught the first try."

Hand over hand, Ramsay dragged himself up the wet line, gripped the wood railing, hauled himself over the edge into the stern walk. Then, after one glimpse through a port, he pressed closely against the white side, sidled round to the door, suddenly flung it open, and was swallowed up inside.

To Don Diego, dizzy and shaken from the mauling he had undergone on deck not long before, the sudden apparition of a glistening black giant from the sea was too much. Horror-stricken, he half turned toward the forward door to flee, when Ramsay reached out one huge paw, slapped it over his mouth.

"S-h-h-h! Don Diego, it's only Lieutenant Ramsay! No noise!"

Not until he saw the terror in Arenda's eyes change to surprised recognition, did he drop his hands. Then he spoke swiftly, pointing to the cabin door.

"Sentry there?"

A nod from the dumfounded Arenda.

"Can you lock it?"

A shake of the head.

"Never mind, then. Strip, *pronto!*"

Quickly he helped the inarticulate Arenda out of his clothes and started to smear him with the mixture of grease and graphite. As he blackened him, he whispered into his ear:

"We'll swim for it! I've got a submarine just astern!"

Don Diego's jaw dropped, an incredulous look spread over his smeared face.

"A submar—"

"Yes, a submarine!" breathed Ramsay fiercely. "And it's awash. No questions now. Swim fast, but no noise, no splashing, and for God's sake, stick close to me!"

A dull rumble shook the *Esmeralda.* Startled, Ramsay paused an instant in in the blacking process. No question. That rumbling was the links of the anchor cable banging in over the hawsepipe. On the forecastle, they were already heaving short; in a minute or two the ship would be underway. Ramsay looked at his companion. Only his face, his arms, his back, were blackened, the rest of him was oddly white. But he dared not wait longer. He tossed the graphite bottle out the port, whispered:

"Come on; it's only fifty yards!"

Softly he slipped out on the stern walk, waved to the invisible watcher on the submarine to stand by, pointed silently, first to the line hanging down from the wood railing, then aft in the direction of the *S-53.* Arenda nodded.

Over the rail went Ramsay, down the line, and slipped quietly into the water.

Noiselessly Arenda followed him; swimming silently side by side, they started for the invisible *S-53*.

Ramsay swam methodically on his side; once only he cast a hasty glimpse backward at the white stern of the cruiser looming up in the darkness over their heads. No sign of any alarm there; evidently they had got clear without arousing the sentry's attention. Satisfied, he turned again, when the water around him started to eddy and swirl and the surface of the ocean became suddenly white with foam and broken water!

The *Esmeralda* was underway! A terrific wake had them in its grip as her propellers churned up the sea beneath them!

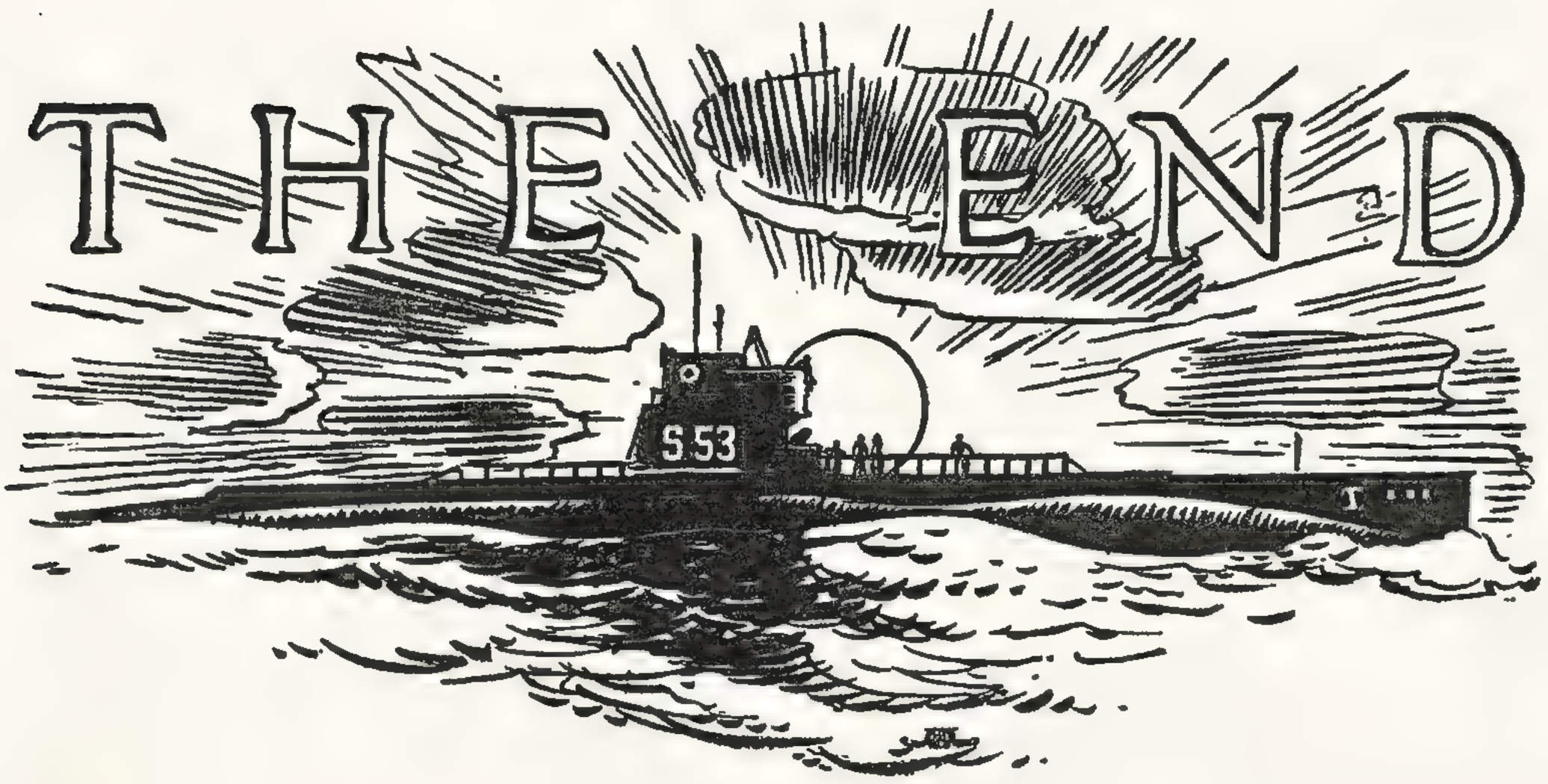
Arenda turned despairingly on his back, gasping for air, then, caught in an eddy, was sucked down. Ramsay seized a vanishing arm, kicked out desperately. The swirling race sucked both men down into the seething maelstrom, then, yards away, spewed them suddenly to the surface again. In agony, Ramsay looked around, caught, outlined by a crest of foam curling against its base, a glimpse of the conning tower a few yards away, saw a life-ring come whistling toward him. He shoved one arm through, with the other clung with a death grip to Arenda, while frantically Joe heaved in and dragged them, weak and panting, into the shelter of the chariot bridge.

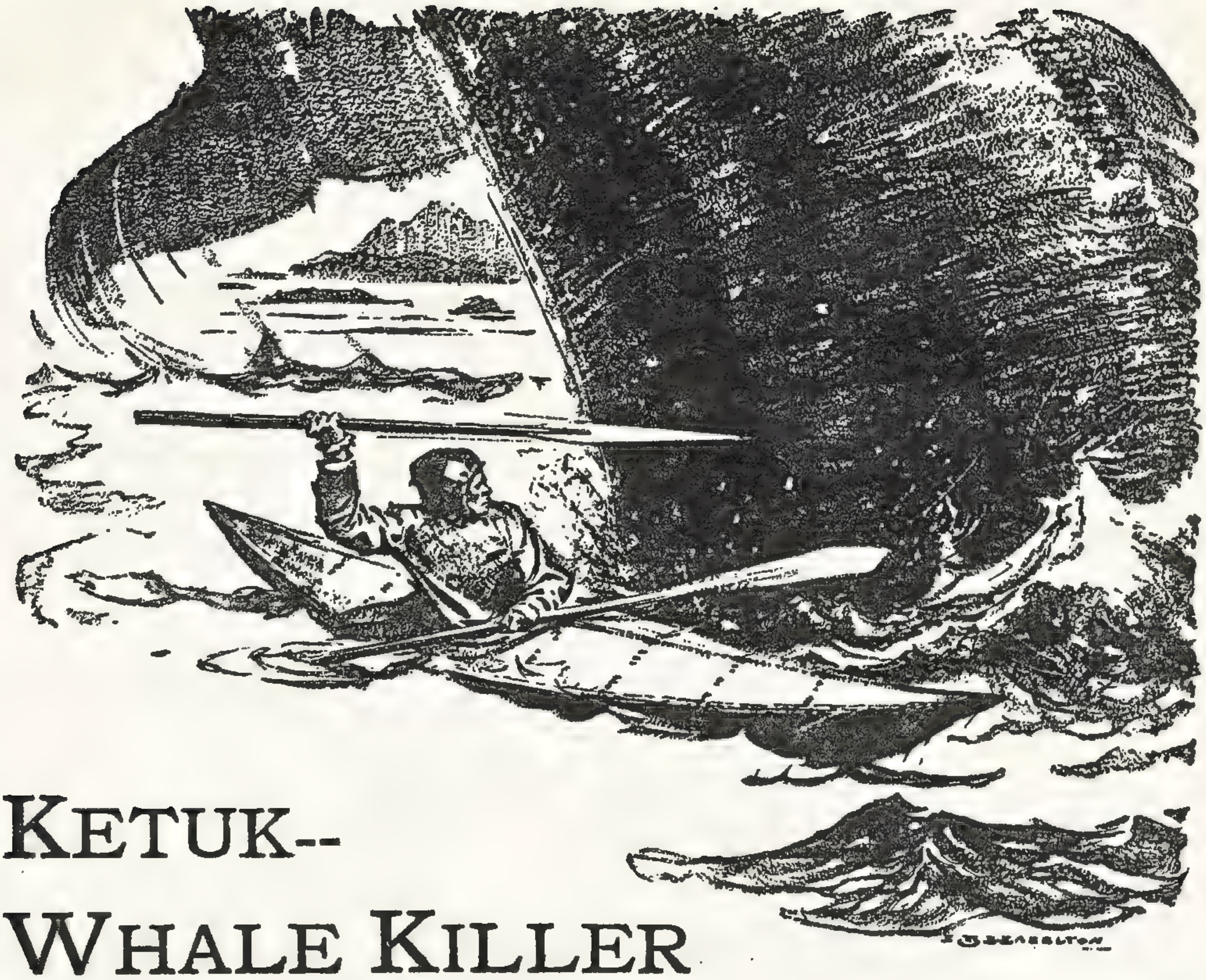
Tenderly Joe passed Don Diego's half-drowned figure down the hatch, while Ramsay, erect now, watched the lengthening wake as the *Esmeralda* gathered speed drew away in the darkness, while the *S-53*, rolling drunkenly in the current striking her broadside, dropped farther and farther astern.

Philip Ramsay saw her go. Below, safely stowed in the battery room, were golden ingots.

Exultantly Ramsay cast a last look at the dark shadow of El Morro there to the eastward. Enough of that. He paused a moment before following the others down the conning tower hatch to shout down the voice tubes:

"Blow all ballasts! Surface condition from now on, with full speed on both Diesels! Course, due North. We're making knots for Panama!"





KETUK--
WHALE KILLER

by Donald D. Loomis

OUT of the icebound Arctic and down the Bering Sea roared the awful breath of the north wind. Against the Aleutian Islands and along the Aleutian Peninsula it howled and screamed and leaped to hurtle the mountain peaks and sweep the mountain passes. Down it swooped on Shelikof Strait, laughing in glee at the open ocean water, then sprang howling on Kodiak Island.

Uganik Bay is a large bay to which the whales once came and where the dolphins used to play. Innumerable millions of salmon came with the spring and turned its water to glittering silver. One indomitable shoulder of rock juts steadfastly into the water. The angry waves of untold centuries have tried to overwhelm this flinty fort, but have been compelled to resort to stratagem and sweep around and cut it off from the mainland of the island. This slow siege of the patient sea has made a crescent bay, and only the mightiest storms ruffle the waters of its sleepy surface.

In the lee of a little hill and on the edge of this little harbor nestled the crushed and huddled houses of the Uganik Aleutes. In all the *brabrarys* not one light was visible, not one wisp of smoke from a cooking fire showed defiance of the Storm God. But the puny race of man was not completely obliterated. Three of them came forth from their homes. In the shelter of the hill they went to the edge of the sea. Here the barren rocks stood in unflinching defiance of the storm and the tortured, sullen sea.

Kegur, chief of the Uganik village, and two others stood with hard, unemotional faces and for a long time listened

to the voice of the storm. Never had they seen the turbulent waters boom on their little beach as they did now. Never before had the strength of the Storm God been great enough to overturn a single *brabrary*. Now two lay strewn in jagged fragments of broken wood.

Taglick, who had not yet finished his home for his bride, must gather wood for a new *brabrary*. His father's house was crowded without him. Lekbarkari's old house was gone. Sixteen of his people had gone to stay with friends. Lekbarkari himself, as befitting the oldest man in the tribe, had gone to the chief's house. Now he stood beside Kegur and gauged the weather and measured the wind. Ayzini, the witch doctor, stood with them. Many, many minutes passed while they stood with unblinking, unexpressive eyes turned to the north. They did not try to speak; that would have been foolish. They listened instead to the deep boom of the ocean, to the cries of the storm.

At last they turned; on slow, uncertain feet they trudged back to the chief's house. Here was the council of elders. The three men moved the short section of tree trunk from the opening to the *brabrary*, ducked low and entered. Kegur, the chief, himself replaced the door in the opening, for only a strong man could move it.

INSIDE was velvety darkness. It was long before the eyes of the three adjusted themselves and could again see their friends. All this time passed in utter, anxious silence. Then Lekbarkari spoke, as befits a man whose skin is wrinkled with sixty wind-swept winters.

"I think the time has come. What think you?"

The chief was a powerful, squat man in the full pride of life. His word was law, even to the witch doctor. The chief was the strongest man, the best hunter and the mightiest warrior in the tribe. None could stand before him.

Now he spoke: "Let Ketuk make ready. Let us remember those without food. Our wives are hungry. Our children starve. For three years the fish have not come to Uganik. The Gods are angry with us and now we starve. Let each man come and be cleansed. Let no woman show her face, no, not even to the youngest girl-child, upon the daylight until Ketuk has gone. Let them hide their faces in the darkest corner of their *brabrary*. See to it that Ketuk goes forth without the anger of the Gods upon him. Only Ketuk can save us now."

Then Ayzini went to the home of Sitkidik. He pulled aside the stiff seal skin covering the doorway, turned and replaced the stones holding it on the bottom. He seated himself against the wall of the little building and gravely said, "*Chemi.*"

"*Chemi,*" came the response in several voices. Then the swish and sound of movement in the darkness as Sitkidik arose from his sleeping robes where he and his family had been lying together for warmth in the fireless *brabrary*. He and his wife, his oldest daughter and her husband, his other two daughters and four sons seated themselves along the walls of the building.

"*Chemi,*" the visitor had said. This was a formal visit, not a neighborly one.

"The time has come," Ayzini said. "Let Ketuk make ready. We have no other man, Ketuk must go."

"Aiiiiyeeee! My son! My son—Ketuk!" His mother, Ayzhune, had been waiting in dread for the summons, yet hoping, where there was no hope.

Amid the mournful moan of the wind the rest of the chief's message was given. It was followed by a long silence; the people in the little *brabrary* were huddled together in grief. Ever since the birth of Ketuk, they had known that

this time would come. They had known that some day Ketuk, their son, their brother, would be called upon to go forth and slay the whale. To this one perilous purpose his life had been devoted.

Ketuk got to his feet, slowly, clumsily. In the low *brabrary* he stood straight and slender with square shoulders and unmoving face. Sitkedik, his father, rose behind him; then one could see that Ketuk was but a boy. He hardly stood above his father's shoulders and his face was smooth and soft; even his grim determination to show no weakness could not make his slender youth seem strong and hard.

When his father had risen Ketuk moved toward the door. Slowly and clumsily he moved, and every eye was turned to the enormous, twisted foot that dragged heavily with each step. For Ketuk was born club-footed; that had marked him from birth until such time as the tribe had need of him.

Keeping protected as best he could from the full violence of the storm, Ketuk made his way to the council house of the Uganiks. Almost thirty feet long by twenty wide, and completely roofed, it was an imposing structure for the little village. Inside the men of the tribe sat cross-legged, waiting. The room was dimly lit by four whale-oil lamps—the only oil left in all the village, placed in shallow, stone dishes with dried kelp wicks flickering.

An aisle had been left, and down this Ketuk slowly dragged his malformed limb. He went to a low, small platform at the far end of the room. Three people sat there waiting for him. One was a young man with deep-lined face and haunted eyes. His left leg had been broken and had grown together crooked. He could hardly walk. The second was a young boy of seven years. He sat straight-backed and still. One of his crossed legs had no foot. The last member of the trio was surely not over two years of age, yet he sat like an old, wise man, with wide wondering eyes. Both his feet were tiny, twisted, unsightly things of dark flesh. He, too, must take his place in the honored ranks.

As the howling storm raged outside, the purification ceremony began. The chief and the oldest man and the witch doctor had said the storm was dying. The wind was no less strong, the sky no less dark. It was the seventeenth day, and no white man could have told it from any other day of the storm. Yet the Uganiks had listened to the voice of the wind. Soon they could put to sea again in their tiny skin boats.

AND so they made ready their whale hunter, with prayer and song, with silence and fasting. For twenty-four hours Ketuk must fast and be purified, must pray and give instructions to his successors. Even as he had once listened to the voice of tradition and knowledge from the lips of his elder, who had been called forth three times to hunt the whale, and had only twice returned. Yet the last time a monstrous carcass had washed upon the beach, a mute testimony of success; it had brought him an honored place in the tradition of the tribe.

The wise men and witch doctors of a white race yet to come would send out word that an exceptionally large number of Innutes and Aleutes were malformed in their lower limbs, seemingly from occupational causes, due to long hours crouched in their boats, from which, as a seafaring people, they gained their livelihood. But the wise men and witch doctors of their own people said that their gods watched over them and marked for their own, at birth, certain infants who were to grow up to be the greatest seamen, the bravest of all the people. And from birth they showed their love of the sea, their contempt for the land, for it was plainly marked upon

them that they might walk, but could never run, they could never be at ease upon the land.

Over a year past Tasitik had broken his leg and the gods had marked him, for it had never grown strong again. Tasitik had not been born to kill whales; no man of the tribe was surprised that he sat on the little platform with fear in his eyes. No man was surprised that the other three, marked from birth, sat and talked in very low tones without trace of fear and with no sign of dread upon them. Very close together sat the four, and very low Ketuk spoke, for none must hear the wisdom of the great fish but those who must hunt them.

As the long day and longer night passed, the men came and went and noted with approval that the youngest upon the stage showed no sign of fear. He did not whimper once. Quietly he turned upon his back and slept, as hour after hour the low singing and wailing of the people rose to the angry gods.

With the dawn the people left. Silently they filed from the council house to find their prayers were answered, the storm had subsided. They returned with water and sleeping robes and without food. The great storm had brought them to the point of famine.

But the tribe was not idle. All the younger men and older boys were sent to the highest points of land. For miles they spread along the coast and watched. All that day sentinels watched. As night came on the wind was completely gone, and the bay quieted to gently tossing water.

It was almost noon when the most distant watcher returned. He reported pridefully to the chief. The elders gathered and began the last of the ceremony. With solemn steps they went to the council rock, an enormous, oblong stone standing on the far edge of the village.

AROUND this stone a full dozen of the tribe gathered. At a cry from Ayzini they lifted it high in air. Under it darted the witch doctor and returned with a spear. A short, slender-hafted spear with a long, thin, broad blade of slate. The black, laminated strata of the slate had been worked and whetted to a razor sharpness; weird symbols were scratched on its surface. The point was long and sharp, the edges swordlike.

But how could one man, even an enormous man with giant strength, drive that brittle slate to a vital spot? Surely no immature cripple boy could take the weapon and go forth in a tiny skin boat and actually kill a whale.

Yet when the rock was dropped back in place the party turned with the witch doctor in the lead and went to the door of the council house. There Ayzini stopped and called:

"The people wait, mighty killer of whales. Come forth, lest thy people perish."

The door opened and Ketuk stepped out. He carried the infant who would never walk, placed it down against the building, and looked around to see if any woman could be found desecrating the spear with her gaze.

The two other cripples had hobbled out behind Ketuk. Tasitik of the twisted leg, who was next to receive the sacred spear, opened his lips to speak. But no words came, only animal sounds that he mouthed in his terror.

He knew that if Ketuk failed in the hunt he would be sent forth next.

Even the most skilful whale killers the tribe had ever possessed—men marked from birth, brought up in strict training and grown to full manhood—had not been able to kill more than a whale or two. The mightiest of all had killed but four. How could this boy succeed? Yet, if he did not, within three days Tasitik must stand there to receive a spear and be driven from the tribe,

not to return unless he killed a whale.

The chief stepped forward and the watchers crowded around Ketuk.

"Where is the whale?" Ketuk asked promptly.

"There are many of them. They sleep after the storm," replied Kegur. Each runner told of the whales he had seen, of the location of each great form sleeping on the quiet water of the bay. Then the party went down to the little harbor and a *kyak* was brought. A small *kyak*, but strong and sound and without a leak. A seal's stomach full of fresh water was given him, a two-bladed paddle with its handle especially shaved down to fit his hand was laid beside the thwart. A new made *camaliki* of fresh bear-gut was handed him by Lekbarkari, whose wife's eldest daughter was the finest craftswoman in the tribe.

Ketuk pulled this *camaliki* over his head and tied the thongs tightly around his face. Lekbarkari himself tied the sleeves down around his wrists. Ketuk seated himself in the *kyak* and the skirt of the *camaliki* was bound securely over the little gunwale that circled the manhole of the *kyak*. Tied thus firmly into the little boat with the strongly sewn, water-tight *camaliki*, Ketuk was ready. The seal stomach was tied to the boat deck just before him, the paddle placed

in his hand, the *kyak* carried the last few feet and thrust into the water. Bound securely to the deck, the whale spear had not moved an inch during this launching.

With firm stroke Ketuk paddled from the little beach out into the enormous bay. Not once did he look back.

THE water of the bay was now smooth and glassy; only the long ocean swells disturbed it slightly. Shelikof is only a strait, a narrow body of water between Kodiak Island and the Aleutian Peninsula, and there the raging waters of the storm were quieted by the unyielding shoulders of land.

Ketuk had hardly started before he saw the first whale. As he paddled steadily onward he passed them by ones and twos, sleeping upon the water. Big and little, young and old, they were resting in the bays and inlets where they had gone to ride out the storm.

Fish merely sought the quiet depth during the long days when the tossing surface of the sea troubled them, but sea otters and whales and seals and other mammals who must breathe on the surface of the water often suffer severely in storms. They suffer and feebler ones drown, and sometimes they are trapped and killed by dozens in the terrible Arctic gales.

But all lesser things had fled before the might of the storm. Warned by their unerring fore-knowledge, the seals and porpoises to the last one had gone to the sheltering southern side of the island. On the north side of the island only the mighty whales remained near their accustomed feeding ground. By scores they had been compelled to seek more sheltered waters.

This Ketuk and all the tribe knew. They knew also that several days might elapse before the vanguard of the seals returned or the forerunner of the fish came back. Nothing less than a whale could save them.

Ketuk paddled very quietly. He went far out upon the bay to a certain point where the watchers had told him his quarry was to be found. Unhesitatingly he passed many whales on the way, for he knew that only the kindly currents of the sea could carry ashore the carcass of the animal he must kill.

The knowledge of these currents was the craft of the whale hunters. Generation after generation they had studied the tides and the currents of Uganik Bay. In all the stages of the moon, in all the conditions of storm-driven water, they could unerringly tell where a given object would beach, if beach it would. This lore, this vast accumulation of knowledge, was carefully handed down from elder to apprentice within the tribe. For what good is it to kill a whale and have it wash upon a distant beach, or be swept out into the ocean?

The great storm had piled high the sullen waters in Uganik Bay. Now they were rushing out again and greatly changing the normal set of the tide. This Ketuk knew, although it was under the surface and hardly to be seen. So only upon a certain part of the bay could he kill his whale with any assurance of its being washed ashore.

Directly to this part Ketuk went, and then began a careful study of each sleeping monster to be found. At last he came upon one leviathan that he studied longer than the others. Long he looked upon the land and upon the sea, and then dipped his paddle deep.

In its vast swing through thousands of miles the Japanese Current collects all manner of floating objects. And as it sweeps past the long arc of Alaskan coastline it has selected, in collusion with the tides, certain points of land from among the thousands that project into its stream. Upon these points it

unerringly beaches in calm weather or grinds in the fury of a storm, the coconut palms and the bamboo shoots, the pine and the mighty fir, that it has collected in its long journey. And in the desolate stretches of the western part of Alaska these points were carefully watched and studied. Every single stick of wood owned by the Uganiks had been brought them by the sea.

In practice hunts Ketuk had paddled close to these monsters. But never before with the sacred spear lashed to his deck. Closer than ever before he must go, closer than man might go with safety. And quietly, very quietly he must go. For the splash of his paddle might awaken the leviathan. One swish with that mighty tail and he would be gone.

Other whales slumbered near by, but Ketuk knew that the gods had selected this one. It was huge and old and lay facing in what the moon and the tides and the storm had told him was the right direction. In his long, silent vigil last night they had told him it must be this one. If he frightened it away there would be no other chance; for if this one were awakened and fled, one splash of his tail would startle those near. They would all vanish in one thunderous flashing of flukes.

Ketuk's eyes were round with awe and doubt. Long moments passed while the tiny cockleshell bobbled up and down on the lazy swells, dwarfed and insignificant. But generations of traditional cunning in a boy's brain guided the little *kyak*. Slowly, foot by unnoticeable foot, the boat approached the head of the sleeping monster. Past the rough side of the whale, to which scattered clusters of barnacles clung, past the raw, skinned spot where a rock had scraped the tough hide and a thick, slimy mass of leeches squirmed, past the quiet, folded flipper and up beside the giant head of the whale.

KETUK was right-handed, the spear was bound to the right side of the *kyak*. He now bobbed up and down with the bow of his boat within three feet of the monster. He took the double-bladed paddle at the middle in his left hand. He pulled lose the thong beside him and took up the spear in his right hand. It was beautifully balanced, and fitted perfectly to his hand. For a moment he paused and took one long look upon the sky, upon the sea and upon the land. One long, deep breath escaped him in a sigh. Then he stiffened resolutely; Ketuk was ready.

But he did not hurl the spear. It is doubtful if the most powerful man who ever lived could have thrust that spear through the tough hide and thick layers of fat that protected the whale, and reached a vital spot. There was only one way in which the slender boy with his brittle slate spear could succeed. But Ketuk knew that way.

Months and months each year of his life, he had been trained to do the task that now faced him. Trained by endless hours of practice at throwing a spear, a tiny dart thrown wildly at a little swinging wooden whale. A small, arrow-like javelin in a small hand tossed quickly at a black streak painted on the back of the swinging whale. And at last his hand unerringly throwing a heavy spear at a tiny mark on a wooden whale that was pulled and jerked with purposeful uncertainty by the strongest men of the tribe. How otherwise could he hope to succeed now?

With the throwing spear grasped firmly in his right hand he reached slightly forward with the paddle in his left and slapped the water smartly, right in the ear of the sleeping monster. He could have stayed further back, but the greater his distance the greater was the risk of failure. Whether he lived or died, he must not miss his mark now.

As the sharp crack of the paddle

sounded in the ear of the whale he came awake with a start of fright. His reaction was instantaneous. Down went his head, up went his back, and he sounded. As the enormous back arched skyward and the black body began to slide into the sea, Ketuk drew back his arm for the cast. When in fright the sounding whale bends almost double and the enormous vertebrae in its spinal column, which are often more than a foot across, open up for inches under the tight-stretched hide. This was Ketuk's target.

So nicely had he chosen his position that the broad, glistening back of the monster surged down into the depths not six feet from him. Further and further the back arched, faster and faster it sank past him into the whispering water. Wider and wider became the space between the vertebrae under the stretching hide of the huge mamal. Not until the greatest width of the monster was before him, with the biggest vertebrae, the widest possible opening between them and the tightest possible stretch of the skin, not until this crittical moment did Ketuk strike. Like lightning his arm flashed, driven by muscles trained to unbelievable quickness.

Straight and true between the vertebrae the spear struck, sheering through the thick hide to sink deep into the almost impenetrable cartilage binding the bone itself together. There the brittle slate snapped as the bony rim of the vertebra closed upon it.

Ketuk delayed not an instant. Desperately he churned the ocean water to foam beneath the great effort of his paddle; but only a flash of time was given him. Even as the spear was cast the tail of the leviathan had risen to the surface, ready for its powerful side stroke. In sudden pain and terror the hind third of the whale rose clear of the water. Up, up into the air rose the incredible, gigantic flukes of the angry creature. Then, spread to their greatest width, flat and awful, they struck upon the ocean with incredible power.

Not three feet from the frail *kyak* the prodigious tail struck, and the water leaped in an enormous wave. Up shot the *kyak* on that wave and Ketuk was prepared. He thrust his paddle instantly upon the water, flat and far, in just the right way to keep his tiny boat from turning over. But sea and sky and the land itself shuddered and resounded to that awful blow. Then the tail slid beneath the water, the wave raced forth upon the ocean in a quickly spreading circle and the little boat remained to show its sleek bottom to the silent sky. Not all of Ketuk's craft and skill had succeeded in keeping it upright.

BENEATH the surface Ketuk was lashed fast into the little *kyak*. He did not struggle to free himself but waited patiently, quietly rocking pendulum-like in the boat. When he thought the violence had subsided from the wave above he quick-stroked with the paddle on a downswing with the boat. The arc of his swing increased and he doubled up, close to the deck of the *kyak*. Bound securely as he was in the boat by the *camaliki*, he and the boat formed one watertight unit. On the next downswing he stroked quick and strong upon the paddle. And then the final effort. With powerful stroke he swung down the pendulum again and up the other side. Like the flicker of a dolphin's tail, the paddle feathered in his hands and the blade at the other end shot out and bit into the ocean. One surge, timed to the instant with the up-swing, and the *kyak* was again upright on the water.

Centuries ago some Aleute had mastered the trick; it had become that tribe's one great feat of seamanship.

Ketuk drew a deep breath and expelled it slowly. He turned and began to paddle unhurriedly towards shore. Nothing save his blazing eyes betrayed

the fierce pride that burned within him. He had killed a whale! And he lived!

Great indeed would be his honor. Now he could take a wife. Now he could live like other men, and none command him, not even the chief of all the tribe. It might be years before he would be needed to hunt the whale again. Years of honor, years of respect.

But by the time he had beached his *kyak* his triumph had grown cold and uneasy. Suppose the whale did not wash ashore? It would die; that he knew. He had seen the spear strike deep into the vertebra. He had seen it break. The fragments that remained within the cavity of the vertebra were broken now, as slate breaks, into flat, knife-edged pieces. As the spinal cord moved back and forth the vertebrae moved one upon another. And between two of them were the thin pieces that must move with the movement of the bone. Moving, they tore and chewed and severed the thick gristle, the toughest nerve cord. Once placed there the jagged, brittle slate could not fail—torture and death must follow.

Ketuk landed on the eastward shore of Chiachil. The tide was low and at the point of turning. Light though the little boat was, it took him a long time to drag it beyond the reach of the coming tide. Then he turned and carefully surveyed the quarter mile or so of uneven beach before him. Here he had planned for the whale to land. Here, on a little knoll by a shallow beach, he could overlook the whole reach of Chiachil, and indicate by his presence the exact spot where he expected the whale to beach. Ketuk seated himself to wait.

THE sun was almost sinking as he assumed his vigil. For two days he must watch and wait. Well he knew that this time the two days were not needed. If the whale did not come ashore on this flood then the ebb tide would sweep it out to sea. Only six hours or so need he wait, but not until forty-eight hours had passed would he be interrupted. Interrupted not to be honored, but to be jeered, to be insulted and sent back again to the mission he must fulfill.

As the sun sank deep into the west and the stars came out and darkness waited the coming of the Moon God, sleep came to Ketuk. All his perplexed doubts could no longer overcome the weariness of his slight, underfed body.

And because he dozed he did not notice the fires that had sprung up behind him. The night was cold. The tribe gathered around the blaze and muttered and prayed and moved restlessly, all but the ancient and feeble and crippled, who were compelled to remain behind at the village. Ketuk slept the miserable, semi-conscious sleep of the cold and weary. A half delirious sleep, in which he stood helplessly upon a point of land and watched the Water Gods sweep whale after whale he had slain out to sea.

All his prayers, all his purifications and promises could not touch their relentlessness. He must go forth and kill and kill, great whales with backs as broad as mountains, with vertebrae as big as *kyaks*, in which he thrust spears as heavy as the sacred council rock until his arm grew weary and dropped uselessly from his shoulder. Then the malignant Gods took the great carcasses, food for all the tribe for a year, and carried them out to sea and lost them. And as he prayed them for one, just one whale he had slain, the Water Gods only shouted in glee at his misery, the evil, unappeased spirits, taunting him with their shouts, laughing, singing—

With a start Ketuk awakened. They were laughing, laughing and shouting and singing! His people, who were around him, laughing and cheering and crying in happiness as they watched a monstrous shape, turned to molten silver in the moonlight, wash ashore in the little shallow at their feet.

A Man Can Be Proud

by William Chamberlain

ME, I always like the night. There's the cool breeze comin' in off the sea and the rustle of the ironwood trees and the slow chirrup of things sleepy in the dark. There's no moon and there's the mountain standin' up at attention against the stars and the wind in the cane like the whisper of warm surf.

The battle lanterns are glowin' red down on the gun line and the ammunition carriers are careless shadows as they slide by in front of the lights, each one with two shrapnel rounds across his shoulders. There's the range sections, talkin' low, and the dull smudge of a cigarette end and, way off and twelve thousand feet up, there's the steady drone of the target plane. Then maybe, a searchlight will come on sudden and bore out into the dark like a blue pencil and then go out. The beam turns orange slow and hangs out there for the time a man could take a deep breath, then the night swallows it up.

Quiet and peaceful, like God was dozing for a little bit. Then the whistles pipe up and down through the darkness and the guns start and echoes snarl back at you from the cliffs, while the flame needles run up and down the front of the firing line and the shoulders of the gun crews are naked and slick against the dancin' yellow curtain of the flame.

Yeah, I've always liked the night when the guns are out.

We went down the road with Punchy Horn's foot on the floorboard and a hundred and fifty horses roarin' underneath the hood. I tried to spit, I remember, and it was like spittin' against a wall. The wind got in my nose. Behind us, ridin' eight tons of gun in the brakeman's seat, was Alvin Miller—a queer man.

The regiment was moving and the regiment was in a hurry. Trucks and guns and men. Above the brown column, the guidons was like a splash of red blood in the afternoon. We went across a bridge and past a mile of marshy lake and down into a stretch of road which unrolled like a white ribbon. There was a fillin' station and a kid yelled at us, excited, as we went by.

Punchy Horn was sayin' out of the side of his mouth, "I met *some* gal last night, Sarge. Can she dance? Whew!"

He had to yell and the wind blasted through the cab and beat the words away from his mouth. The windshield was a little loose and it rattled as we swung around a curve. Punchy Horn was short, with freckled arms laid across the big steerin' wheel and a snub nose and his go-to-hell hat pushed way back on his head. He was maybe the best driver in the regiment. It takes good drivin' to snake an eight-ton gun at fifty miles an hour.

"You think too much about girls," I yelled back at him.

"I'm funny that way, Sarge."

"You ain't goin' to get any place thinkin' about girls, son."

"The hell I ain't. Man, was she a honey! I got a date with her the next time we hit Holdersburg."

"You ain't goin' to hit Holdersburg again, soldier."

"Well, there's girls in the next burg we hit."

The white ribbon was all unwound now and the road took an S curve and began to climb up a long slope with orchards along the side. It was in August and the apples were ripe and they looked good, I remember. Punchy had to shift, jammin' his foot twice against the clutch and the gears meshed nice. He was pretty good, like I told you. A hundred and fifty horses hit the collar all at once and the smooth roar sounded pretty. It was hot in the cab and sweat run down into my eyes.

"I got a girl in every town, Sarge," Punchy said after a while. He took one hand from the wheel and pushed his go-to-hell hat farther back still. It hung there and he grinned some more. "I always got a girl. Ask that monkey back there."

"You been tanglin' with Alvin Miller, kid?" I asks him. "You let Alvin Miller alone—he's bad."

Punchy squints at his oil gauge and the pressure is okay—Punchy's careful about his truck. He slams his foot harder against the accelerator as the road get steeper. Those apples, on the trees along the road, were bigger and redder than any apples I ever seen. Punchy grins again with his mouth crooked.

"Miller? He ain't bad," he says. "He's just a big palooka, Sarge. A big horse-faced palooka. One of these days I'm goin' to let the air out of him. Yeah, me!"

"I'll pick a good burial party for you, kid. Mike Sanders and Jim Dowd and . . ."

"I seen him standin' in front of the post office, Sarge, talkin' to this gal last night. Pretty? My God, she was the answer to a soldier's dream. I walked up to 'em slow. I got a way about me, Sarge.

" 'Good evenin',' I says. 'Darlin', do you always look so sweet or is tonight somethin' special?'

"That overgrown gorilla back there on the brake gives me some dirty looks but he don't say nothin'. Margy—that's

her name, Sarge. Pretty, ain't it? I found it out later. She smiles a little at me and I knew it was all over. I've made love to a lot of 'em and I ain't never been wrong yet.

"'I think maybe tonight's somethin' special,' she says.

"'Maybe we could go some place and dance, baby?'

"'Maybe we could.'

"And all the time this moose is standin' there with his hat set square on his head like a damn general, Sarge, and his eyes lookin' mad."

Punchy Horn's hat was never set squarely on his head. Maybe that was the reason that he had made love to so many. I didn't know. We hit the top of the hill and there was a valley down below filled with purple haze and there was trees and white houses with fences and strips of green lawn in front of them. The wind smelled good—like flower gardens of an evenin'.

That was Clarkstown, I knew. We were going to camp in the fair grounds on the other side of town.

"You be careful of Alvin Miller," I said, I remember.

"Naw, I ain't goin' to be careful of *him*, Sarge!"

IT was daylight for a long time that evenin' and everything was lazy and peaceful. The smoke from the rollin' kitchens went straight up into the air and there was something comfortable in the rattle of mess kit lids and the sounds of men movin' across the dry grass. The regiment was feelin' good.

I stuffed tobacco into my old pipe after supper and went slow across the ball diamond to where the bleachers was. There was soldiers sittin' on the benches, smokin' and laughin' and talkin' soldier talk. Some of 'em were singin' and the song went up soft in the dusk.

"There's a long, long trail a-windin',
Into the land of my dreams . . ."

Soldiers like to sing that—I don't know why. Still, I like it; maybe because it takes me back to those days in France. I climbed up near to the top of the bleachers and rested my shoulders against the hand rail and listened. Bits of conversation drifted by in the darkness.

" . . . corporal, hell! They wouldn't even make you a bugler, Frenchy!"

"Hey, Joe, Frenchy thinks he's goin' to be corporal. Can you tie that?"

"Yeah? He'll be corporal in charge of the spud-peelin' detail. He's been peelin' spuds long enough to be a general."

"Aw, pipe down, you—"

Soldier talk! I've listened to it for thirty years and I still like it.

There was another man sittin' on the top of the bleachers, maybe a dozen feet from me. I didn't notice him at first, but then I seen that he was sittin' with his elbows on his knees and his head propped in his hands. I don't know why, but sudden I knew that trouble—bad trouble—was brewing up there in the dusk above the baked ball diamond.

It was Alvin Miller sittin' there.

He had been in the outfit maybe a year and nobody knew anything about him. A big, hulking, doughy-faced man who soldiered good and kept to himself. An, all of a sudden as I set there smokin' my pipe, I remembered something that had happened back in barracks maybe three months after Alvin Miller joined the outfit.

Shorty McDowell was supply sergeant then and Shorty was a great man to ride a recruit. Had kind of a nasty tongue, too. I remember Alvin Miller was in the supply room drawin' a new issue of clothes.

"Strip off your fatigues, recruit," Shorty McDowell says to him, "and try on that shirt. I ain't got all day."

The battery office was right next to the supply room and there was a window between, so that it wasn't hard for me to see and hear what was goin' on. Well, Alvin Miller sort of hesitates for a minute and then he peels off his denim coat.

God must of been tired when he built Alvin Miller. He's a big man with doughy shoulders and bulges all in the wrong places. I was sittin' there smokin' and with nothing much to do, so I watched. Then I seen something which I wondered at a little. He had a little gold chain about his neck and there was a heart-shaped locket at the end of the chain. Soldiers don't go in for heart-shaped lockets much as a general rule.

Well, Shorty McDowell seen it, too, and I could tell by the crooked way he smiled that Shorty McDowell was goin' to start something. He reached out a hand for the locket—Shorty had big, hairy hands.

"Oh," he says, "A pretty. Give us a look, recruit."

Alvin Miller pulls back but he don't say nothin'. Shorty McDowell was a dumb oaf—*I* could have seen enough in Alvin Miller's face to keep from meddlin'. But Shorty was dumb, like I told you, and when he misses the locket he wants to see worse than ever. He comes around the end of the counter where Miller's stuff is layin' waitin' to be issued.

"Recruit," Shorty says, nasty, "I ain't a man to be trifled with. Give me a look at that damned trinket you're wearin'."

"Let it be," Alvin Miller tells him in a high-pitched voice.

Well, Shorty McDowell grabs again and he gets his fingers on the locket and the chain snaps. Shorty wasn't a bad sort at heart and he hadn't meant to break nothin'—but, now that it's done, he tries to bluster through it. He pries open the lid with a thumbnail and looks at what's inside.

"A nice lookin' floosie," he says—and knowin' Shorty, I knew that he was tryin' to make up for bustin' the kid's trinket. "I wouldn't mind steppin' out with her."

Well, like I told you, I was watching Alvin Miller and it was lucky for Shorty that I was. I seen what I saw and I'm an old man, but I got through that door in nothin' flat.

There was a bayonet layin' there on the counter, Shorty had been cleanin' it when Miller came in. I grabbed Miller's hand. I'll swear to you, the point of that knife wasn't an inch from Shorty McDowell's throat when I pulled it away.

"I'll kill him," Alvin Miller was sayin' in sort of a dull, colorless voice that made my blood run cold. "Get away, Sergeant, I'll kill him."

Shorty McDowell was back behind his counter now and I tell you he looked scared. He looked at Alvin Miller's face and then he went back into the end of the supply room and he set down on a bale of waste and tried to roll a cigarette. His hands was shakin' so that he was spillin' tobacco all over the floor—and Shorty McDowell don't scare easy. The locket was lyin' on the counter.

"My God, mister," I starts, "they stretch men's necks in this army for killin's like you was about to perpetrate. Maybe—"

"I'll kill him," Alvin Miller is sort of mumbling. "He called her a floosie. I'll—"

"Get back to the squad room," I yells at him. "Get back before I call a squad and have you led to the guardhouse . . ."

Well, I didn't say nothin' to the captain right then—I knew Shorty would keep his trap shut. There was plenty that Shorty had kidded rough that would be pleased to hear how a recruit had almost fixed his clock with a bayonet. And, after a while, things went

along smooth again and I forgot about the whole thing. Alvin Miller was a good recruit and a good soldier.

SITTIN' up there in the bleachers now, though, it come back to me and I was scared. Scared, like I had been back in Shorty McDowell's supply room. I didn't know why.

I knocked my pipe out and went over and sat down by Alvin Miller. He looked up for a minute to stare at me and then looked down again. I remember he had kind of a funny face, ugly and all out of shape. You couldn't tell much of what he was thinkin'. I waited for Miller to say something.

He didn't.

"Pretty little town here," I says finally. "A lot nicer than Holdersburg, where we stopped last night, it seems to me."

Then I stopped and I could have kicked myself down out of them stands for bein' dumber than the dumbest K.P. back at the kitchens. Sudden, I had remembered Punchy Horn hunched over the wheel of his truck and with his go-to-hell hat pushed onto the back of his head. I could still hear the hard note in Punchy's voice.

". . . an' all the time this moose is standin' there with a look in his eyes an' his hat set square on his head . . ."

"Well, I got to be gettin' along," I starts to say to Alvin Miller.

He turns to me slow and I can see his big knuckles white in the dusk. Down below some of the bunch is still singin'. I wished to God that they would stop.

"Sergeant," Alvin Miller says slow and deliberate, "this outfit ain't big enough for Horn and me—and I got to stay. He'll either get out—or I'll kill him."

It was kind of awful—the quiet way he said it. I tried to laugh, I remember, and the sound was about as mirthful as water drippin' from a leaky roof. I've been around. I've seen tough men—seen 'em kill and seen 'em die—but I never seen one quite like this Alvin Miller.

"Ah," I tells him after a while, "Take it easy, kid. You're all het up over nothin'. There's that little thing that happened last night. Forget it. Punchy Horn's just a crazy kid. He don't mean no harm—there's lots that way."

Well, Alvin Miller turns and looks at me and then he gets up slow and he goes down across the bleacher seats. I can remember, still, how funny the sound of his footsteps was goin' down across them empty boards. After a while I got up and went on back to camp.

I was some worried and I couldn't sleep, so I went out and sat on a gun trail for a long time while I smoked and thought. Tattoo come, blowin' sweet and clear across the darkness.

I figured some but there wasn't no answer that I could see. After a while, I went over to where Corporal Billy Gee had his pup tent pitched.

Billy Gee had soldiered with me for goin' on twenty years and he would have been a sergeant long since if it hadn't been for a bit of over-fondness for liquor on pay day. We was good friends; he was older than me a little, and wise. I called soft.

"Billy," I says, "Come out and smoke a pipe with me. I can't sleep."

Billy Gee grunts a little but comes and we go over and sit on the gun trail again. The stars seem awful close and Billy and me smoke and say nothin' for a long while. We don't need to talk a lot; we've been round some together, in France and down on the Border.

Then Billy says after a while, "There's something botherin' you, Sarge. You might as well spit it out."

He went on smokin'. All of a sudden—I don't know why—I remembered how red them apples had looked along the side of the road when we were comin' up that long hill this afternoon. It's

funny how little things like that will stick in a man's mind and come popin' up when he least expects 'em. There's a poppy field over in France, for example, that I can remember as plain as the afternoon when I first seen it.

Well, I told Billy Gee. I went back to the beginnin' and I told him about that afternoon in Shorty McDowell's supply room and about what Punchy told me when we were wheelin' over the road in the prime mover and about Alvin Miller up there in the bleachers tonight. Billy Gee smoked and didn't interrupt me.

TAPS goes. Not near as pretty as tattoo to my mind but pretty just the same and peaceful.

After a while Billy Gee knocks out his pipe and stuffs it into the pocket of his old breeches. His hair is dead white now and clipped close and he runs his fingers over it.

He says, "Sarge, I don't reckon I ever told you that I was born in Holdersburg?"

"You did, Billy," I answers him. "That's one reason I wanted to talk it over with you. This thing's got me worried."

"Yes, I was born in Holdersburg. A hell of a long time ago, now. It's a pretty place."

"I seen it was."

Billy didn't pay no attention. We understand each other pretty good, like I told you. Over beyond the parked trucks they was changin' reliefs of the guard and the corporal's voice come across the burned grass to us, clear and distinct.

"Number Three—post!"

"I've always had a kind of interest in Holdersburg, Sarge. All these years I've kept track, as well as I could, of what went on. This Alvin Miller—I knew his old man. Alvin was about so high when *I* left but I knew 'im the minute I seen 'im; he's got the Miller mark. I didn't let on though, Sarge. There ain't no good in lettin' folks see you know too much."

I agrees with him.

"Old Simon Miller—he was Alvin's old man—was no good. His wife was no good. They had a lot of kids and they was no good—except maybe Alvin. There's a family I read about once in a book. I disremember the name.

"Jukes?" I asks him.

"That's the name all right. Well, the Millers was a lot like them Jukes. They was lazy and shiftless and there wasn't no good nor pride in 'em. Except, like I told you, maybe Alvin. He was different from the rest of the tribe."

"He's a good soldier," I told Billy Gee.

The old man fished in his pocket and got out his pipe again; but he didn't light it, just sat there with it dead in his teeth. The moon was comin' up and the guns was long shadows across the burned grass.

"I seen he was a good soldier," Billy Gee said. "I been sort of keepin' an eye on him—maybe because he come from Holdersburg. When I left he was doin' errands for old man Williams who run the hardware store. Afterward I got letters now and then."

Billy Gee stopped for a long time but I didn't hurry him. Like I told you, we knew one another.

"He was maybe thirteen," Billy said finally. "The flu came along that year and it took off the whole bunch of 'em except Alvin and the baby—a girl. I reckon there was a little enough mournin' in Holdersburg; the Millers wasn't held in high esteem. Well, no matter. Anyhow, I heard from time to time."

Billy Gee stopped and struck a match to hold to the dead bowl of his pipe. The light flickered along his seamed face and, over beyond the gun park, the crickets was singin' shrill in the dead grass.

"I remember you got letters in France," I said.

"They stayed there in Holdersburg. After a while, I guess, folks began to forget what a worthless tribe the Millers had been. Anyhow, the letters that I got from old man Williams used to say that Alvin was takin' care of his sister and gettin' along right well in the hardware store."

"Maybe this sister would be named Margy," I said.

"That's right," Billy told me with a funny look. He didn't ask me how I knew. "This Alvin was a queer sort. Kind of prideful—proud of the Millers, if you can figure *that* out—and it seemed like he wanted to show folks that all of the Miller clan wasn't bad. Anyway that's how it looked to me. Of course I didn't have anything to go on but old man Williams' letters."

"Pretty fond of this Margy, wasn't he?"

"Worse than that. He was crazy about her and proud as hell. He wanted her to be a lady—why, I don't rightly know. Maybe because she was his sister; maybe because all the other Miller women had been so rotten. I guess he had his troubles."

"Such as?"

Billy Gee spat and put his pipe back into his pocket again. It was gettin' late and I remembered that reveille was goin' to go at the same hour as usual. A car was goin' by out on the road and its headlights crawled fast over the gun paulins. Then the light was gone.

"She was a good looker, so I've heard," Billy Gee said after a little while. Then he stopped for a long time. "Well, all the Miller women was good lookers—and most of 'em was bad. This girl—I don't know. Alvin got himself in trouble a couple of times over fellers that was hangin' around her, I've heard. I reckon he had a good right to want to keep an eye on her, though, seein' as he had took care of her since he was thirteen."

I nodded solemn.

"Well, just before old man Williams died there was a letter come from him. I was in the Islands at the time. It was the last one I had and it was a long one. Times was pretty bad, he said. The depression had shoved him to the wall and he had had to let Alvin go. There wasn't nothin' he could do about it.

All of a sudden, I happened to think of Alvin Miller's service record and that made a lot of things plain to me.

"He draws thirty dollars a month," I said to Billy Gee. "On pay day he gets three dollars handed to him. The other twenty-seven goes some place else on an allotment."

Billy nodded and sucked at his pipe.

"Sure," he said after a while. "It goes to her. I reckon Alvin has had a right tough time livin' on the three dollars that was left."

"Uncle don't issue no shavin' soap," I answered him, thoughtful. "He don't issue no tobacco. Come to think of it, I ain't ever seen Alvin Miller smoke."

"A man don't do no smokin' on three dollars a month." Billy Gee said sourly.

"And Margy?"

"I wouldn't know. The letters stopped, like I told you. I'm bettin' she got along all right, though."

"And what's the answer, Billy?"

Billy Gee spat again and got up off the gun trail. An old man who had been a lot of places and who had seen a lot of men—good and bad.

He said, "Sarge, you tell me what the answer is. I'm turnin' in now—reveille comes early."

I went on back to my tent slow and I was thinkin' a lot. Alvin Miller's face, like I seen it up there in them bleachers, kept bobbin' up in front of me and I was worried.

REVEILLE goes before daybreak when the regiment's out in the field. The bugler came by my tent and called low but I was already awake and pullin' on my boots when he come. He sounded first call from the edge of the ball diamond and the music was good—hard and cheerful against the chill of the grey light. I went on down to the kitchens and got me some coffee; it was hot and good. When you get old there's nothin' like hot coffee in the morning.

Marty Good, the first cook, was fryin' potatoes in a big square pan as I went around and stood with my back to the fire. I been soldierin' for thirty years now and the cold gets into my bones a little in the early morning.

Marty asks, "You think we're goin' to start shootin' tonight, Sarge?"

I tell him yes, that I figure we will.

"I'll have to figure on gettin' some doughnuts made some time today, then," Marty says. "Them gun crews come in hungry after a shoot."

"They do, Marty."

Reveille goes then and the battery is fallin' in in a ragged line in front of the pup tents. Over across the ball diamond the sun is comin' up red, and I know that it's goin' to be another hot day. An hour later the outfit is on the road.

It was a long march and a hard one that day. We stop for maybe a half an hour at noon at eat cold lunches. Then the captain blows his whistle from the head of the battery column and the trucks and guns haul out onto the concrete again.

I'm glad, because there ain't any chance for anything to happen with Alvin Miller ridin' back there in the brake seat and Punchy Horn in the cab with me. Once, durin' one of the halts, I went back and pretended that I was lookin' over the gun to see that the dogs were tight. Miller was already down on the concrete with a hammer in his hand.

"Everything ridin' okay?" I asks him.

He just nods—don't say anything.

"We ought to be gettin' into firing position by four o'clock," I said cheerful. "Damn if I won't be glad to be gettin' off the road."

Alvin Miller finished settin' the dogs down. He drops the hammer back into the tool box and climbs back up into the brake seat. Not until he gets settled there does he look at me square and when he does there's something in his eyes that sends cold shivers up and down my spine—and I don't shiver easy. He looks at me for a long minute and then he turns and looks at the cab where Punchy Horn is.

"I'll be glad to get off the road, too," he says soft and I knew that I was talkin' with a man who was half crazy with hate.

WELL, it happened that evenin'.

We went off the road and into position just at sundown and, after thirty years in the army, I can still get a thrill out of watchin' a battery goin' into firin' position in a hurry.

We were close to the sea and the clouds was gold and scarlet and the water was a sort of shimmerin' silver out there in front. The road hit a long, easy curve here and, back behind, you could see the regiment steamin' along—a hundred feet between each gun truck and the guidons bright in the sunset.

Yeah, I like goin' into battle position, especially at night.

First there's the gun commanders runnin' out in front to signal their guns into position. Then the drivers shift and the trucks come roarin' down the line with the guns bobbin' and swayin' back of them and the gun crews hangin' onto the truck bows. In a split second the guns are unlimbered and the trucks are roarin' back to their parks and the gun crews are at the jacks, droppin' eight tons of gun square onto a point you

could cover with a dime. The outriggers come down, then, like skinny fingers against the sky and the gun covers come off and the jacks clank as steady as the beat of marchin' men's boots on the road.

Back behind is the range officer and the chief of range section, squattin' with pads on their knees while they figure firin' data; off to one side, men are liftin' oblong boxes from the ammunition trucks. I've seen it a thousand times, maybe, but it's always new and always sort of grand to me.

Well, we were ready to fire by the time dark come.

I was goin' back to the kitchens which were spotted in the middle of the ironwood grove—and then I seen 'em. I knew, sudden, that it was Alvin Miller and Punchy Horn. Their voices come to me plain.

Alvin was sayin', "You got it comin' to you. You're goin' to get it, Horn."

His voice was like the sound a slow whirlpool makes when it sucks something down—and Punchy Horn was standin' there and laughin' at him.

"Ape," Punchy Horn said, "I play when I please and how I please. If you don't like the way I play you can just break down and cry, Ape. Now, you get out of my way. I have drove ninety miles today and I'm goin' to spend the night shovin' shells into a gun breech and right now I figure on gettin' me some coffee. Good-by, Ape."

I tried to get there in time, but I'm an old man.

Alvin Miller sort of jerks—I've seen a man jerk so when a bullet takes him between the eyes—and then he lurches forward with both arms swingin' wild. There was plain, crazy murder in that face of his. Miller outweighed Punchy Horn by seventy pounds and stood a good six inches taller—besides being crazy mad.

Well, Punchy Horn had said, back there in the cab, that he would take Alvin Miller to pieces. He did it.

Punchy Horn was grinnin' as he blocked and bobbed away from the big man's crazy swings. Then he stepped inside quick and he hooked both hands to Alvin Miller's head. The big man went down like he had been pole-axed. He got up slow and Punchy Horn smashed him down again. I remember that I wondered at the way Punchy Horn could hit.

Four times—and I couldn't do nothin' but stand there and watch while the blood trickled down into Alvin Miller's eyes and slobbered across his loose mouth. Punchy Horn stepped back a little and was grinnin'. I knew, then, where I had seen him before.

It had been maybe four years ago and I had sat in Madison Square Garden and watched while a kid named Denver had cut the featherweight champion of the world to ribbons for nine rounds. The champion had knocked him out in the tenth. That kid was Punchy Horn and it didn't seem queer, now, that Alvin Miller should be sittin' there on the ground with the blood smeared across his big, ugly face.

Punchy Miller said, hard, "Ape, you want some more?"

Alvin Miller didn't say anything, but the bitter, hopeless, beaten look of his face was enough to sicken a man. He lifted one hand and wiped at his broken mouth and Punchy Horn spat and went off through the trees whistlin'.

I started to go up to where Alvin Miller was, and then I knew better and went on toward the kitchens. The smell of coffee was good in the evenin'.

WE started firin' at maybe eight o'clock and it was a grand night for it. Cool, with no clouds to speak of and a nice breeze comin' in from the sea.

"C" Battery—that's my outfit—was to fire last. The men lay in the sand,

back of the gun line, and talked in low voices and watched while the other batteries opened up. The searchlight beams was spearing out over the water and, in their middle, the target was a white sliver. Three miles out and twelve thousand feet up. It takes good shootin'.

"K" Battery was gettin' ready to fire way down on the left flank of the regiment. For a tight second before the guns started you could hear the voices of the men in the range section snappin' back through the night. Clean, hard voices which was good to listen to.

"Rates okay!"

"Altitude okay!"

"Data okay!"

Then a whistle ripped through the night.

Yellow flame vomited along the line and the echoes smashed back from the cliffs. It was nice work. Seven thousand yards away a white cotton puff blossomed against the silver of the target; three more followed—then another four and the guns hammered on.

"Good shootin'," Billy Gee yelled in my ear and I nodded.

After a while the guns stopped and I got up slow. A voice was driftin' down from the left of the gun line.

"G" Battery all through, sir!"

One more battery to fire and then "C" would take its turn. I blew hard on my whistle and men got up from the sand and began to fall in.

"Gun sections—post!"

We were on our way. As Number Three gun section went by I caught a quick glimpse of Punchy Horn's face in the red glow of his cigarette. He was grinning and his go-to-hell hat was pushed onto the back of his head. Farther along I could see Alvin Miller's stooped shoulders and, all at once, the worry of the last two days was on me heavy again.

I stood with a foot on one of the outriggers of Number Three gun and listened while Billy Gee talked with his gun section. Billy was a good gun commander, like I told you. He was talkin' to them easy and cool and they were listenin' to him talk.

"Some of you is recruits," he was sayin', "and you're scared. They ain't nothin' to be a-scared about. You know what your job is—you do it, see? Don't you think about nothin' else. There ain't anything goin' to hurt you. You, Horn!"

"Yeah." Punchy Horn's voice answered Billy out of the dark. Punchy Horn was loader on Billy's gun; Alvin Miller was an ammunition handler.

"Suppose you fumble a round—bump the nose so that the fuse starts burnin'. What you goin' to do?"

"Stick 'er in the gun and shoot 'er."

"Right," Billy Gee told him. "They's plenty of time—if you don't lose your head. Well, what do you say? Let's go!"

There's parts of that night that stand out awful clear and there's parts that's indistinct—like the captain talkin' to me for a minute before we opened up and Alvin Miller's bent shoulders goin' across the light toward the gun. It all makes a sort of a crazy pattern now, like something I seen in a dream.

Well, we opened up.

There's a hell of a racket and a sort of a smooth, controlled excitement about a gun battery that's firing a hundred and twenty rounds per minute. The crashes slap against your face and the muzzle blasts are like snatched glimpses of the insides of white hot fire boxes and the power of it all is headier than whisky. I was standin' by Number Three—that's Billy's gun—and the crew was workin' like well-oiled clockwork.

It happened sudden and I can still see every move—clear, as though I was watching a slow motion picture.

Punchy Horn had swung around from the fuse cutter with a shrapnel round in his hands as the gun came back. Number Two gun went off right then but, in spite of the crash, I could hear that nasty, metallic click as the recoilin'

breech hit the nose of the shell in Punchy's hands. Punchy remembered—but he was scared, bad scared.

He tried to shove the round into the breech, like Billy Gee had told him but he fumbled it and it smashed down onto the platform, rolled off into the sand. I was a dozen feet away but I could see its wicked slimness in the glow of the battle lanterns. A thin trickle of smoke, spittin' from the burnin' fuse, boiled up from the brass point of the shell.

It seemed like a long time that we stood there, nobody movin'—and the seconds was tickin' by fast. Then Billy Gee was jumpin' forward; he was clear on the other side of the gun and I knew that he'd never make it.

"Hit the ground!" he was yellin'. "Hit the ground!"

WELL, Punchy Horn was no coward and he was no fool, either. He knew what would happen if that shrapnel round burst there with four gun crews within a hundred yards. I still take my hat off to him.

He jumped down into the sand with his fingers reachin' for that slim and wicked bit of death, but he didn't make it. Like I told you, it all happened fast, but the details are still as clear as though they had been painted on a piece of canvas and hung up in a room.

Punchy twisted a foot against one of the outriggers and smashed down with his head bangin' hard against the platform. He tried to get up but couldn't make it. I could hear a man's breath whistlin' harsh against his teeth and those precious seconds was tickin' away fast. I remember Billy Gee was runnin' forward and the picture was plain there in the red light of the battle lamp.

A man said soft, "Oh, my God!"

Then a black shadow was jerkin' Punchy Horn out of the way; it was straightenin' up tall and that brass-cased round, with its wicked curl of smoke, was in a pair of big, awkward hands. Alvin Miller! I could hear the scrape of the hobnails in his shoes plain as he stepped up onto the steel platform.

Well, he didn't quite make it—but he saved the lives of maybe twenty-twenty-five men and he saved the life of Punchy Horn.

He shoved the round into the breech, but that racing pin-point of fire in the fuse had reached the shrapnel charge before the breechblock could close. Red flame fanned around the muzzle and them wicked lead balls, which a second before had been threatenin' the lives of a hundred men, squalled harmlessly out into the night high over their heads. You could almost feel the sigh that went up in the night. You see, it was a minute or two before we knew what had happened.

The breechblock hadn't closed and that shrapnel case had slammed back against Alvin Miller. It would have smashed Punchy Horn's head like an egg shell—except that Alvin Miller had stopped it with his chest.

HE was still alive when we got up there and we laid him on a blanket close beside the ammunition stack. The red light of a battle lantern was fallin' across his face and his eyes were open. Punchy Horn was on his knees beside him and Punchy's face was a terrible thing to look at.

Alvin Miller said, "Was anybody . . . hurt . . . Sarge?"

His voice whistled a little and there was a big drool of bloody froth on his lips. Back in the dark behind the guns I could hear them yellin' for the medico. It's funny how I can still remember all them little things about that night. The faint drone of the plane, for example, and the way Punchy Horn's fingers shook when he reached out to push the hair out of the dyin' man's eyes.

Alvin Miller turned his head a little

to look square at the man he had wanted to kill.

"Listen," Punchy said hoarsely and my skin crawled a little at the sound of his voice. You'd have thought that he had taken that shrapnel case in the chest. "Listen, Miller. You know. Back there in Holdersburg, day before yesterday—"

There was more bloody froth on Alvin Miller's lips now and his breath whistled worse. A medical corps man came up and started to kneel down beside the blanket. I caught his arm, I remember —I didn't know why.

"Wait," I told him and he stopped.

"Margy's a . . . good . . . kid," Alvin Miller was sayin', slow and distinct. "She's a . . . little high spirited . . . maybe . . . but she's . . . a . . . good kid. . . ."

Punchy Horn was a tough man. I once seen him cut the featherweight champion of the world to ribbons. He was bendin' forward so that Alvin Miller could hear him.

"Sure, she's a good kid, Alvin." Maybe God laid his hand on Punchy Horn that night. "A hell of a good kid, Alvin. Her and I are goin' to get married. We was goin' to surprise you. A good kid, feller. You can be proud of her."

I could see Alvin Miller's face plain in the flickerin' light and I don't reckon that I'll ever forget it. It seemed like all the pain and the bad things had been wiped away. He tried to smile a little.

"I guess . . . a man . . . can be . . . proud of . . . a sister like . . . her . . . Punchy. . ."

Well, like I told you, I'm an old man but I can still see that night as plain as I can see the flashes which run up and down the gun muzzles when the regiment is on the firin' line. I think of it a lot when we're out on the road—slammin' down the concrete with Punchy Horn's foot on the floorboard and a hundred and fifty horses hittin' the collar all at once.

Punchy and Margy have got two kids now—boys, and the oldest one is named Alvin—and I reckon Punchy and Margy are about as happy as any two people I ever seen. Punchy likes to talk about the kids when we're out on the road, but Punchy's changed a lot. For one thing, he wears his hat set square on his head now—like a damn general.

IS THE DAVIS CUP A LOST TRAIL?

Don't miss "Across the Net", a behind-the-scenes picture of big-time tennis, by George Lott, five times National doubles champion, nor Rabbit Maranville's story of the long comeback road, "10,000 Years in Baseball."

In the Same Issue

"Pinch Rooter," a big baseball novelette by Judson P. Philips; stories of the ring, the track, the pool, the racquet circuit, by Bennett Wright, L. E. Boyle and many others.

HEADLINE SPORTS BY SPORTS HEADLINERS

The Big September Issue Is Out July 17th

DIME SPORTS MAGAZINE

THE CAMP-FIRE

where readers, writers and adventurers meet.

JOINING our Writers' Brigade in this issue is Donald D. Loomis. His story is the first one he has ever had published, but he has written plenty of them for what the printers call the hell-box.

It did not surprise us that he wrote to us from San Diego. In our experience California is the state of writers, and this takes no account of the Hollywood group, who do not write our type of stories. As the second writers' state, but a very poor second, we might pick Connecticut. Aspiring writers usually think that New York City would be the answer to all their ambitions, but writers who count avoid this city. Many of our most valuable contributors have not seen New York in years. They can't work here, and wouldn't live here anyway. It is rare that a good story or a good book comes out of New York City.

We wish Donald Loomis good luck and want to see more of his stories. There is writing in the air along the West Coast, and here our air holds carbon monoxide and talk-about-writing in equal parts. Loomis writes:

I was born and raised in Oregon, as were my parents. Am an even thirty years old and have had the advantages of two years in high school for education. My earliest and most earnest ambition was to be a writer and I was quite seriously collecting material, which I still have, while still wet behind the ears.

However, my father became paralyzed from the hips down and I was taken from school and went to work in a box factory. Three years of helping the family and studying and reading, then finances got straightened around and I set out to indulge my second most pressing ambition, to see the world.

Took a trip thru western Canada with a friend and came back thru Montana. With another friend, older than I and an experienced prospector, went to the Mother Lode country and started massaging the hills

around. After a few months we were offered what we thought was a good chance and went to Calaveras County and spent fourteen months, mostly underground, trying to re-open a famous old producing gold mine. No dice.

I stumbled around like any other prospector flat on his backside for a few months, then decided to go to Alaska, as it was the Golden North and I was after gold. Started north in the Spring of 1928, hocked my watch in Seattle and bought a ticket to Ketchikan. No work. I'm not just sure whether I starved to death or not. When I next revived I had bummed a ride on a Halibut boat to Petersburg. Got work there, went halibut fishing later, went on to Juneau, worked, got flush and went prospecting. Still no dice. Worked some more, decided I knew enough to write, came back to the States and tried it. No go. Went back to the Mother Lode and prospected a while without much success.

Decided to lead with my chin again and returned to Klamath Falls, Oregon, and settled down for something over a year of concentrated effort. Taught myself to typewrite halfway decently, studied this writing game and wrote religiously eight hours a day. Studied minerology, geology and chemistry in the meantime under a tutor. Couldn't sell a story, but was quite happy because I was making improvement in my writing, began to figure that with two or three more years I could make it stick. However, I ran out of what it takes and succumbed to temptation and returned to Alaska with my old pal of the Canadian trip, who had gone on and become a mining engineer.

With another party we landed on Uganik Bay of Kodiak Island and set about busting rock and turning up dirt. Found a vast deposit of platinum, too low grade to be worth a hoot. Hard rock, in case anyone is curious, hypersthene and pyroxinite. Went from there to the town of Kodiak, from there to the extreme west end of the island, to Red River Beach and did some beach mining. This beach was discovered and worked before the famous Nome beach. It is pretty well worked out, but I scratched out a few dollars.

There were some twenty other gentlemen already there and one of them had been twenty-two years around Kodiak Island. He told me plenty about the natives. He and his partner and I went looking around the island and found nothing valuable. I spent something over a year there, then went on to the central part of Alaska, where I worked underground, and for the highway, and chopped wood. Two of us put up three cords each day in the early winter. Four foot wood, but split. Then we went to Chitina and flew to Cordova, and I came out to the States.

My plans got crossed up by a tempting offer and I went back underground and spent some nine or ten months. We were getting a little gold, but I quit because of partner trouble, couldn't agree on the way of conducting mining operations. Went on another prospect and things were just beginning to really blossom out in nice shape when I got bunged up a bit. So we lost out.

I lay on my back for several months and came out of the coma determined to lead with my chin again. Went to work underground but before I could save up enough to settle down in earnest to write the injury began bothering and I had to quit. So here I am bouncing typewriter keys anyhow.

I have had two really first class adventures, real hair curlers, that I would swap lies about with most anyone except the heroes of our recent war, which I was too young to enter. Aside from that I have had a few of the troubles which most men underground face sooner or later, especially in hay-wire little prospects that can't afford the time or expense of proper timbering. Have found prospecting so interesting I could hardly ever settle down to do any writing, but when prospecting I think most of writing, just as when trying to write I think most of some prospect.

As to the material from which this story was written, I don't pretend to be an authority about the Innutes or Aleutes, but the man who told me about them is. I have been around them some, though. Once I was storm bound on Aiktalik Island in an Aleute village where only two people could speak a little English. Talk about hospitality? They had it, plenty. While there I saw a little chap practice throwing a dart at a beautifully carved and painted little wooden whale which a toothless old man swung back and forth. He was fat and wobbly on his legs and couldn't yet talk, but he hit the whale, no bigger than your fist, once in four or five tries. I tried and couldn't hit it once after half an hour. That was in 1932, and the boy would grow up to shoot a gun. They still throw a spear just for the fun of it.

For the benefit of anyone who might know something about the Aleutes, I will remark that there was another way they had of hunting whales. I know it well. Since it required staying at a distance and, even with the best spearmen, missing nine out of ten shots, it was very slow and uncertain of results. Thus when positive action was desired it was obtained as told in the story.

MAYBE Donegan Wiggins or Pink Simms or some other experts on guns and Western lore among our readers can send us the answer to this question of C. B. Denman, Hamilton, Bermuda.

I am employed in the Customs Section of the Post Office, and I had the pleasure of seeing something very interesting, through official channels, quite recently after having read the article in Camp-Fire concerning Ben Thompson and King Fisher.

It was a complete belt, holster and forty-five, bearing the inscription "King Fisher" on the left hand side of the belt buckle. It appears to have been carved with a knife, some time ago, and is upside down. The belt is still filled with cartridges, which are covered in fat, and the gun has three notches carved in the left hand side of the butt, and the whole outfit looks ancient enough to be authentic.

I am writing you hoping that you will be able to give me some information if it is one of the original guns of Fisher.

SOME friendly back-and-forth talk about the Everglades recently in Camp-Fire brings us another first-hand account of experiences there, this time from A. J. Miller, of Belle Glade, Florida.

At the risk of being considered a buttinsky I'm going to horn in between Hapsburg Liebe and Comrade McGinty in regard to the Everglades. As you see by my address I'm in a position to speak, being on the front doorstep of the Everglades.

One can go due west from where I'm writing this, about twenty miles, turn due south and you won't see a human being until you cross the Tamiami Trail. On the way you will run into "gators" galore if you know how to look. "Ut" Mills and myself got sixteen last week, largest 7′ 6″. Hides sell $1.00 to $1.25 each. This within five miles of Belle Glade. Rattlesnakes aplenty in the "high spots". These spots being about three feet above the Everglades level. Moccasins by the bushels. "Ut" don't even jump when he sees one in his way, in his barefeet too. Another thing, we never wear shoes. Piece of an old tire casing for sandal and piece of inner tube wrapped around the legs is all one needs. Snakes never hit your feet—unless you step on 'em—and not above the knee. Coons—well, the season is over now—but just run a trap line with me and see 'em in about every fifth trap. 'Possums—some. Fish, none after you leave the canals until you hit the sloughs from the west coast. All sawgrass! Endless miles, mostly ankle deep water. A hammock here and there. Seminole Indians below the Tamiami Trail—hunting otters of which they catch only one and then quit trapping until they eat that up. 'Bout ten dollars worth. And so on until you reach Cape Sable, and talk about bass—trout we call 'em—a paradise.

HEREAFTER letters addressed to John Newman Page, *Ask Adventure* expert on Southern Mexico, should be sent care of our magazine. We'll forward them. He has left Cuantla, Morelos, Mexico, and wrote us:

I am now on a goat ranch in Arizona. It is my present intention to herd goats two or three months, then herd sheep for awhile, and then work as a cow hand. This will give me a pretty fair picture of present day life in the West.

My only adventure during my first five days on a goat ranch was with a rattlesnake, whose only offense was to behave himself like a gentleman and warn me to keep my distance. I killed him. I know very well that his conduct was more creditable than my own.

Herding goats is a wonderful experience. If I change my mind and stick to it, I am firmly convinced that I can win the 1940 Olympic Marathon race—especially if we can get the officials to strew the 26-mile course liberally with sharp rocks. The only person who could defeat me would be another goat herder.

PERHAPS Didier Masson will read the following letter from Francis Rotch, of Bellevue, Washington, and write us an account of himself. In addition to satisfying the curiosity of this reader, he'd interest all of us.

Was looking through Camp-Fire, that's where I look first, and saw a letter from Didier Masson.

You sure passed up one there, old top, letting a letter from Did go without some kind of a writeup. Do you know who that bird is? Ask any old TTT or sky jumper from the

AEF War. They will tell you. Most of them will tell you plenty, some, tales that will make your back hair curl, and none of them will be half enough.

My deep wonder is what Old Did is doing in British Honduras, haven't heard of any rumpus from down that way for some time. Yet BH. is pretty handy to several borders, one can jump either way as occasion demands, and you can bet your last *peso duro* that lad is not a bit scared to jump. Either at 'em or from 'em.

Maybe Did's softened up and settled down, though I doubt it. I'm curious.

NEIL O'KEEFFE, who has been illustrating for our magazine for fifteen years (in this issue he did "Brown Man's Burden" and "A Man Can Be Proud") has been selected to do six mural posters for the Texas Centennial illustrating important scenes in Texas history: Galvez landing on the island that is now Galveston, the Chisholm Trail, the surrender of Santa Anna, the fight at the Alamo, the founding of the University of Texas at Austin, the cattle industry in present Texas. These mural posters will be used in nation-wide advertising of the Centennial. Mr. O'Keeffe will be in Dallas for some months, but meanwhile his work for us will go on.

JACK ABERNATHY dropped in yesterday—"Catch-'em-Alive Jack", with his wide plains hat, and the customary bulge of a gun on his hip. The bulge is there for two reasons. He has worn a gun so many years that without its weight and sag he doesn't feel right. And every now and again somebody comes along out of the past in which Abernathy was a Western peace officer and arrested nearly eight hundred outlaws of various kinds and sent many on to prison or noose. He met one two weeks ago on Eighth Avenue. He had sent the man's two brothers away, and just missed this one at the time. Jack didn't want the man any more, but the fellow tagged him along for a block making threatening talk, until Abernathy tapped his hip, and the man went away. It isn't that Jack Abernathy thinks he has anything to fear (apparently he's never had any fear anyway) but he went so long without being caught napping that he might as well go the rest of his road the same way. I guess that gun helps him keep his world alive, and without it he'd seem old and lost.

He was a hunting companion of President Theodore Roosevelt, and a noted trapper of wolves. He usually took them out of the traps alive. He's well known for his barehanded fights with these liberated wolves, and has strangled to death a good many of them.

Jack Abernathy came in to say that he expects to ride a horse from New York City to Hollywood, leaving the city at the end of June. A son made that trip once in sixty-two days. Jack is allowing more time, because he's going to lecture along the way.

There's a matter of a horse—he's looked around and found two good ones—and a good comfortable Western saddle. It has to be a Western saddle because Abernathy says no other kind is worth sitting on, and moreover, "That's a real long ride."

I had a notion that our magazine ought to get Jack Abernathy his horse and saddle. I saw the business manager about it. A business manager is always a good fellow except when you tackle him on a matter of some unusual expenditure. He'll buy paper and ink, and suffer in silence at the way editors throw money around for stories and illustrations, but his hair bristles at the suggestion that he should buy somebody a horse and saddle. His organization has no horse and saddle appropriation, and anyway it isn't going to be disrupted by arranging new horseshoes in Kansas, etc.

If Jack Abernathy comes through your town, I hope you'll hear him. No man has more good stories to tell, and he belongs to an American frontiersman type that is going fast.

—H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

information you
can't get elsewhere

THE clean, cool breeze of the sea *versus* asphyxiating and deleterious gases.

Request:—Can you inform me of the requirements for entrance into the Chemical Warfare Division of the United States Navy? Also something of its history? Pay?

—WARREN UTZ, New York, N. Y.

Reply by Lieut. Comdr. Vernon C. Bixby:—The Navy does not have a Chemical Warfare Department as a separate unit. Offensive measures are under the control of the Bureau of Ordnance, and protection against gas is handled by the Bureau of Construction, and repair and by the Medical Department. The value of the use of gas for offensive operations in naval warfare is yet to be demonstrated. I believe that I am correct when I say that in only two instances did the Germans, during the late war, use gas in a naval engagement. Its effect was negligible.

Gas warfare is by no means a new idea. The Greeks about 400 B.C. used sulphur and pitch to make choking and poisonous gases, and in 424 B.C. they even had a flame thrower made of wood. The Romans used their catapults to throw resin, sulphur and burning oil, the Saracens and the Crusaders used fire and sulphur. Charles the XII of Sweden used burning straw for smoke screens and arsenic fumes for gas. During the Crimean War the English government would not permit Dundonald to use sulphur and coke in his attack on Sebastopol. During our own Civil War burning sulphur and pitch were used at the siege of Charleston.

The Hague Convention of 1899 contained a clause prohibiting the use of "asphyxiating or deleterious gases." All of the major powers, except the United States signed. Germany first violated this agreement in 1915 at Ypres when they used gas against the Canadians and British. Germany did not realize it at the time but the use of gas over a wide front and pushing home an attack would have won the war for her in 1915. The delay, until the next gas attack six months later, enabled England and France to make preparations.

I do not believe that gas will ever be a serious factor in naval operations. Even gas dropped from air-craft would prove to be no serious handicap to fleet movements.

MAKING it harder for the trout—two queries from a fisherman.

Request:—Can you inform me how to make artificial flies for fishing or furnish me with information as to whom to write to for this data? Also where I might buy the necessary material to work with?

And will you please send me information about preserving salmon eggs without using salt, or at least just a small amount of it as the trout in this country shy away from salty eggs?

—NORVAL LEE, Portland, Ore.

Reply by Mr. John B. "Ozark Ripley" Thompson:—You can get better directions about making artificial flies than I can provide in a letter, by mentioning my name, and writing to Oscar Webber, Webber Lifelike Fly Co., Stevens Point, Wis. Also you can purchase all necessary materials from him.

Use a twenty percent solution of formaldehyde to preserve the salmon eggs.

DIGGING into pay dirt—and history.

Request:—I should like some information about some of the less visited ghost towns in the West. I am interested in coming out there to pan for gold. Can you give me any information about that? Which state do you think is the best for placering?

—CHESTER OSTERMAYER, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Gordon Gordon:—Ghost towns dot the West. You can go into almost any county and find at least one and often several. Few of these are visited, since most of them are off the beaten road, forgotten by this generation.

Among the most famous ones in Arizona is Galeyville, not far from Tombstone. In the 1880's when Tombstone was the worst "hell camp" in the West, Galeyville was even more scarlet. The town, which at one time numbered several thousands, was the hang-out for cattle rustlers, killers, stage coach robbers and adventurers. When Tombstone dwindled, Galeyville died. Today you will find only the remains of an old foundry at Galeyville. Cows graze peacefully where gunmen once "shot it out." Another famous place, also connected with Tombstone's history and only a short distance from that town, is Charleston. Some of the buildings are still standing there. The roofs have fallen in, the walls are collapsing but Charleston still retains something of its old grandeur when riches poured out of the town. I visited the place recently. You can still see evidence of Apache Indian attacks. The safe, built into the wall of the general store, is still there, locked—as though to keep the curious from intruding upon the glamour of days that are gone forever.

Calabasas, another ghost city, is on the border, not far from Nogales. Before the twentieth century began, the town bid fair to become the most important border post. But it died and Nogales, an insignificant settlement in the days of Calabasas' glory, outdistanced it. Ehremberg, another ghost town, is on the Arizona-California border. Quite a few people still live there, or in the neighborhood. So perhaps it should be classed as semi-ghost. Anyway, at one time it fairly reeked with wealth and men rose overnight from paupers to princes.

But it doesn't matter where you go in the West, you will find ghost towns and often an old prospector in the neighborhood who can tell you tales that will make your blood freeze and other yarns that stir your imagination.

In regard to panning gold, thousands of miners are now in the hills of a half dozen western states. Few of them are making any real money. Among the states where I know gold panning is paying something, even though a small something, are California, Arizona and Colorado. If you are interested in Arizona, just write to the College of Mines, University of Arizona, Tucson, and they will send you a booklet which lists the most favorable spots, tells you exactly what equipment you should have, and includes a few maps.

And here's hoping that you have a good trip, if you do come West to hunt ghost towns or gold, and may you find plenty of both.

THE glory that was theirs fadeth not away.

Request:—I understand that Queen Victoria of England claimed descent from King David of Judea. Can you furnish the genealogy?

I understand that some people claim that the stone in the seat of the English coronation chair is the stone Jacob rested his head on at Bethel. Can you furnish a brief history of it?

I understand that some claim that the English are descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel. Can you give me an outline of that theory?

Can you give me a list of books dealing with the preceding questions?

Can you tell me where I can obtain a topography map of Palestine, that would be in detail enough for making a raised map to scale?

Where can I obtain the details for constructing ancient war engines such as the Romans used at the Seige of Jerusalem?

—W. E. LITTLE, Dallas Center, Iowa.

Reply by Captain H. W. Eades:—

1. *Genealogical descent of Queen Victoria of England from King David of Judea.*

The present Prince of Wales (grandson of Queen Victoria) is accepted as being the one

hundredth generation in line from King David. Queen Victoria would therefore be the ninety-eighth in line. I have not the complete genealogy to hand.

References: "Royal House of Britain—a genealogical work compiled from irreproachable sources", Milner. Price, $1.00. "Chart of the Royal House", Milner. Price, 30c.

2. *Jacob and the English Coronation Stone.*

The episode of Jacob and the angel, in which his name was changed to Israel (which means "he who fought with an angel") took place at Peniel or Phanuel. I understand that during the recent British Jubilee celebrations it was officially announced for the first time that the coronation stone was the same stone upon which Jacob rested his head at Phanuel.

The story accepted by British Israel followers and by the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America is that it was originally the coronation stone of King David and the other Israelite kings, and that it was brought to Ireland by the prophet Jeremiah and the princess Tamar Tephi or Tea Tephi (a descendant of King David) at the time of the second captivity and used for a great many centuries on which to crown the Kings of Ireland (or some of them—since there appear to have been a multiplicity of Kings of Ireland). The stone is said to be composed of a certain kind of sandstone which is found only in Palestine. It was carried about by means of an iron ring let into the stone, through which a pole was strung. I understand that the iron ring still remains attached to the stone, but is worn almost completely through by use and by rust. It was eventually captured by the Scots and taken to Scotland (Scone) and used for the same purpose in that country for some centuries. It was captured by one of the Edwards (Edward I, I think) taken to London, and became the foundation of the British coronation chair.

References: "Coronation Stone", Rogers. Price 45c. "David's Imperishable Throne", Whitehouse. Price 10c.

3. *The English and the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel.*

Members of British Israel or the Anglo-Saxon Federation would be much incensed at hearing their beliefs called theories! They call them facts.

The lost ten tribes (with part of Benjamin) were carried into captivity 721 B.C. by the Assyrians into Media, Persia, and other regions near the Caspian and Black Seas. The remaining two tribes were carried into Babylon in captivity 604 to 585 B.C. They were permitted by Cyrus to return to Jerusalem about seventy years later (the tribe of Judah with some Benjaminites and Levites —hence the name "Jews"). The ten tribes were never placed under severe durance but were more or less left to themselves. They migrated into Southern Russia and the Danubian regions, and were mentioned by Herodotus as living there about 400 B.C. Later they moved further westward and at the time of the fall of Rome the various tribes were known as Goths, Visigoths, Sacci, Danes, Scythians, etc. These were the fellows who sacked Rome. They came into the British Isles in successive waves as Angles, Saxons or Sacci, Danes (tribe of Dan) and the last wave were the Normans or Northmen under William the Conqueror in 1066 A.D.

Joseph (one of the sons of Jacob) had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, who founded two half tribes which both became numerically powerful. According to some, the U.S.A. is said to be largely Manassehite, and Britain largely Ephraimite.

Hundreds of books have been written on these matters, and I cannot give you a list of all of them. I suggest you write to Howard B. Rand, General Secretary, Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, 601 Fox Building, Detroit, Mich., for a price list and catalogue of works, This movement has spread very rapidly of late years in the British Empire and the U.S.A., and there are probably branches in your state of Iowa where you can get first-hand information. The official magazine or periodical of the organization is called the "Messenger of the Covenant".

4. *Topographical map of Palestine.*

Ask Mr. Rand for this. If he cannot supply you with one, he will be able to tell you where you can get one.

5. *Engines used by the Romans at the Siege of Jerusalem.*

The classical and the finest description of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. is contained in the account of Flavius Josephus, who was an eye-witness and a leader of the Jews at that time. One million Jews perished in this terrible siege. Josephus describes wooden "banks" or ramparts behind which the besiegers sheltered themselves from arrows and other missiles. They erected high wooden towers, covered with plates of iron, which were moved up close to the walls and overlooked them. They also had engines or catapults which threw javelins, darts, and large stones. Josephus describes how the white stones glistened in the sun as they were hurled through the air, and the Jews were able to dodge them. The Romans accordingly became wise to them, and painted the stones black! They also

had battering rams which pounded holes in the walls.

I have no details at hand as to the construction of these various primitive engines of war and do not know where you could get same. Perhaps if you consult some work on the history and development of military engineering you might find the information you desire. Doubtless they were all of simple construction.

THE eye cannot follow the swallow's flight . . . but put a band on his leg.

Request:—Please send me any general information on birds. Please send me any information which you have on bird-banding. Am especially interested in this aspect of bird study. I would also appreciate your sending me any addresses from which I can obtain additional data.

—Sam Levin, Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—For general information on birds, consult Chapman's *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*, and *The Book of Bird Life*, by Allen, at your public library.

To practice bird banding, trapping permits must first be obtained, one Federal permit from F. C. Lincoln (in charge of bird banding), United States Biological Survey, Washington, D. C., and one State permit from your State Department of Conservation, at Harrisburg. Bird banding operations here are conducted under the auspices of the Survey, and that Bureau will be glad to send you instructions for banding and for making reports. You may receive further advice and assistance from the Eastern Bird Banding Association, the name and address of whose present secretary Mr. Lincoln will be able to supply you.

The Survey will supply you with bands and report blanks, but you are expected to furnish your own bait and traps. You may either make these, or purchase them from dealers whose advertisements appear in bulletins of the Bird Banding Association.

There are in general use at present three types of traps. One operates on the principle of a simple funnel-like entrance permitting easy access, but so constructed as to confuse the departure of the birds that have found their way in. Another type of trap is set so that when the bird alights near the food a spring, weight or other device automatically closes the door. Then there is a trap mechanically similar to this one, except that the door is closed by a cord operated at a distance from the blind wherein the operator lies concealed. Operators are continually, of course, attempting to design new and better traps, which endeavors color this game with a live outlet for one's native ingenuity and resourcefulness. It goes without saying, that for such as ducks, the trap must be in the water, for ground birds, on the ground, for other species the traps are placed on trees of varying types at varying heights.

The pursuance of this work is not recommended unless the operator is prepared to use the utmost care in identification of his birds, following this up with enthusiasm and persistence in keeping his records and watching his traps. This recent adjunct to the Science of Ornithology is chock full of fascination, but like all worthwhile achievements it also represents a background of continuous hard work.

Of course, the greatest thrill comes with the taking of our larger species. However, as Dr. Allen says, "One not located so that he can trap wild ducks can still derive a great deal of healthful recreation out of trapping and banding small birds, for the principle is the same, and when the returns begin to come in, there will be all the excitement of an election. . . . One might expect that the trapping and handling of the birds would so frighten them that they would leave the vicinity and never venture near the traps again. On the contrary many of them form the trap habit and will be seen going into it even when it is not baited, and they may be taken several times a day. Even the wary ducks have been retaken within two hours of the time they were banded."

Dr. Allen's statement is interesting in that it bears out the fact that wild creatures are wild only because of persecution; trapping for banding is not persecution. The ease with which the most apprehensive species of our waterfowl and other birds appreciate this proves that a sane code of national conservation laws would quickly restore the confidence of many of those creatures that today are so wild that they shy faster from the haunts of man than from a forest fire.

Suggest you write the Supt. of Documents, Washington, D. C., for M.P.58 and enclose five or ten cents (I forget which); this will bring you *Manual For Bird Banders*, by Lincoln and Baldwin, a valuable little pamphlet for your purpose.

THE bookworm turns to the criminal.

Request:—Crime detection has always held an extremely great interest for me, and I

would be grateful if you could give me any suggestions as to what books on scientific crime detection I should read and where these books may be obtained.

—Ernest Bernhard, Augusta, Ga.

Reply by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—Yours is a rather hard job to answer, however, here goes to the best of my ability. I haven't a proper list of books on scientific crime detection, but some of the following may be of help to you. You may be able to obtain them through your local public library. If not, you may have to buy them from the publishers.

Private Police, by J. P. Shalloo, Ph.D., 240 pages, Price $2.50, American Academy of Political and Social Science, 3457 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Pots O' Gold, by Matt R. Penrose, Warden Nevada State Prison, Price $3.00, The Penrose Book, Carson City, Nevada.

These two are more or less general books, but you might get some good out of them.

For books on Criminal Psychology you might try the following:

Gault, Robert H. *Criminology.* D. C. Heath & Co., Boston and New York. 1932. 461 pages.

Karpman, Ben. *Case Studies In the Psychology of Crime.* Printed by the Mimeoform Press, Washington, D. C. 1933. 5 parts.

Lichtenstein, Perry M. *A Doctor Studies Crime.* D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., New York. 1934. 263 pages.

Rhodes, Henry T. F. *Genius and Criminal*: a study in rebellion. J. Murray, London, England. 1932. 318 pages. This book includes a bibliography on the subject.

White, William A. *Crimes and Criminals.* Farrar & Rinehart, New York. 1933. 276 pages.

Willemse, W. A. *Constitutional Types In Delinquency.* K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., London, England. 1932. 266 pages. Practical applications and bio-physiological foundations of Kretschmer's types.

For books on Crime and Criminology you might try:

Bernard, Luther Lee, ed. *The Fields and Methods of Sociology.* R. Long & R. R. Smith, Inc., New York. 1934. 529 pages.

Bureau of Social Hygiene. *Criminological Research.* The Bureau of Social Hygiene, New York. 1934. A pamphlet.

Calvert, E. Roy & Theodora. *The Lawbreaker*: a critical study of the modern treatment of crime. G. Routledge & Sons, Ltd., London, England. 1933. 294 pages. Has a bibliography.

Dilnot, George. *The Real Detective.* G. Bles, London, England. 1933. 233 pages.

Ettinger, Clayton J. *The Problems of Crime.* R. Long & R. R. Smith, Inc., New York. 1932. 538 pages. Has bibliography.

For books on Identification and Detection of Criminals you might try:

Adams, Arthur T. *Adams On Finger Prints.* Remington Rand, Inc., Buffalo, New York. 1933. 155 pages.

Burns, Thomas J. *What Are Finger Prints?* Thomas J. Burns, Charlotte, North Carolina. 1932. 88 pages.

Burrard, Gerald. *The Identification of Firearms and Forensic Ballistics.* C. Scribner's Sons, New York. 1934. 220 pages.

Cooper, Courtney R. *Ten Thousand Public Enemies*: foreword by J. Edgar Hoover. Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass. 1935. 365 pages. This is a consideration of crime in America today and an account of the work and method of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U. S. Department of Justice, under J. Edgar Hoover, Director.

Frankel, Harold A. *Finger Print Expert.* Nandor-Wilson, Inc., Philadelphia, Pa. 1932. 217 pages. Has bibliography.

Fricke, Charles W. *Criminal Investigation.* O. W. Smith, Los Angeles, Calif. 1933. 265 pages. Covers the investigation of criminal cases, the securing of evidence and its proper presentation in court.

Gribble, Leonard R. *Famous Feats of Detection and Deduction.* G. G. Harrap & Co., Ltd., London, England. 1933. 210 pages.

Larson, John A., George W. Haney and Leonard Keeler. *Lying and Its Detection.* The University of Chicago, Press, Chicago, Ill. 1932. 453 pages. Has a bibliography.

May, Luke S. *Scientific Murder Investigation.* Institute of Scientific Criminology, Seattle, Washington. 1933. 96 pages.

Rhodes, Henry T. F. *Clues and Crime*: the science of criminal investigation. J. Murray, London, England. 1933. 283 pages. Has a bibliography.

Saudeck, Tobert. *Anonymous Letters*: a study in crime and handwriting. Methuen & Co., Ltd., London, England. 1933. 142 pages.

Shore, W. Teignmouth, ed. *Crime and Its Detection.* The Gresham Publishing Co., Ltd., London, England. 1932. 2 volumes.

U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation. *Criminal Identification*, by John Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, Washington, D. C. 1933. 13 pages. Lithographed.

U. S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Fingerprints.* U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 1935. 28 pages.

U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation. *How to Take Fingerprints.* U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 1933. 9 pages.

The Work and Functions of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, by John Edgar Hoover, Director, Washington, D. C. 1935. 19 pages in mimeographed form.

Collier, Rex. *Training of Personnel,* Federal Bureau of Investigation, U. S. Department of Justice. The Washington Star. 1935. 25 pages. Reprint of an article published in the Washington Star, February 24, 1935, by special permission.

For a book giving bibliography of crime and criminal justice you might get:

Bibliography of Crime and Criminal Justice, 1927-1931, compiled by Dorothy Campbell Culver, for the Bureau of Public Administration, University of California. The H. W. Wilson Co., New York. 1934.

For other bibliography you might get in touch with the Chief Librarian, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

GEOLOGICALLY the second largest island in the world is largely unknown.

Request:—I understand New Guinea is a rich field for the gold prospector.

Just what is the gold situation in New Guinea?

How much would a six months' expedition cost? About ten in the party.

Are supplies expensive?

Would it be cheaper to bring firearms with us or purchase them after arrival?

How big a slice does the government take from your gold?

If you could add any additional tips, such as probable cost of the journey from the United States to New Guinea, laws pertaining to gold mining, etc., it would be greatly appreciated.

—Donovan R. Every, Cottage Grove, Wis.

Reply by Mr. L. B. Armit:—First of all, I must tell you that New Guinea or Papua (it has two names) is the *second largest* island in the world. It lies in the southern tropic, due north of Australia, and it covers about 308,000 square miles of the North-Western Pacific Ocean.

The island is divided into three sections: the western half is owned by Holland; the north-eastern section is the Territory of New Guinea (formerly German New Guinea), and the southeastern portion is the Territory of Papua. Australia administers the Territory of New Guinea under a Mandate from the League of Nations; but the Territory of Papua is *owned* by Australia. The two Australian governments are separate organizations, with separate governors, officials, etc.

Gold has been worked the Territory of Papua since 1888. The first payable gold was discovered in the Territory of New Guinea about ten years ago, since when it has been the principal export of that territory.

The principal goldfields are, at present, in the Mandated Territory, and the gold export from them last year amounted to about $6,000,000. Most of this was won by dredges, though a considerable amount came from placer mines and reefs. There is still a vast area of country that is unknown geologically, so it is quite probable that other gold and mineral fields may be found in this area. The same remark applies to the Territory of Papua, though the unknown country in this territory is of smaller extent.

You ask me to tell you how much it would cost ten men to spend six months prospecting in New Guinea. This is a difficult question to answer, for the cost depends on the equipment that they would deem necessary. Incidentally, a party of ten white men would be much too large, for such a party would require at least a hundred native porters to transport equipment. No white man can go more than a few miles from the coast without the help of native porters; this country is not the country that a lone hand can travel over.

You must remember that you will have to take into the interior with you every ounce of food, equipment, etc., that you will need while you are on the journey. And as there are no roads in the interior except the trails that you chop through the jungle as you travel, every ounce of stores, etc., will have to be carried by your porters. Since aerial transport came into use between the coast and the goldfields, transport has been speeded up a lot; but, once you leave an airplane landing-field, you will have to depend on your porters to carry your equipment.

Two white men and twenty-five natives, properly equipped, should be able to spend six months prospecting in the mountains for a cost of £600 Australian.

There are stores at Salamaua (Mandated Territory) and Samarai and Port Moresby (Territory of Papua). All supplies can be purchased at these ports; though, of course, you could bring your supplies from America

or Australia. Prices are higher here than they are in Australia or America.

You could bring your firearms and ammunition with you from America; you will buy them very much cheaper there. The laws of the Mandate Territory prohibit the importation of .303 rifles and ammunition of that calibre. You will need a permit to have a firearm in the Mandated Territory; there is no such restriction here in Papua.

A royalty of seven and one-half percent is paid the Government for all gold won in the Mandated Territory; there is no such royalty or tax on gold won in Papua, except gold associated with copper, etc.

There is, of course, customs duty payable on goods imported into the Mandated Territory, or into Papua. This duty works out, roughly at about ten percent ad valorem, though certain goods pay specific duties. A primage duty of four percent is also charged on all goods brought into Papua.

Steamship fares from San Francisco to Sydney, Australia, are from £78, single first saloon, and from £50.10.0, single cabin; these prices are given in Australian money. From Sydney the Burns Philip Line run a three-weekly service to Papua and the Mandated Territory, the fares being, Sydney to Port Moresby, single saloon, £16, and Sydney to Salamaua, same accommodation, £22, Australian. You will require a passport. Persons coming to Papua have to lodge £30 with the Customs on arrival; this money is held until the person departs from Papua, or, if he becomes indigent, it is used to defray his fare from the country; otherwise, it is returned to him before he leaves. A similar deposit has to be lodged on entering the Mandated Territory, though the amount is £50 there.

It would take pages and pages and pages to even briefly outline the mining laws of both territories. Briefly, any *white* man can go mining in Papua or Mandated Territory, but he must first obtain a Miner's Right, the cost of which is £1 per year in the Mandated Territory, and ten shillings per year in Papua.

COMPARISONS may be odious. But here's an interesting one.

Request:—Have had some tremendous arguments with a friend from down under, Australia. It's about the respective ability of the riders and the quality of the horses of the two countries, North America, especially the West, and Australia.

The argument of the Aussie is that in that country they ride with a small saddle, much like the English hunting saddle, and with this equipment break all their horses. He claims that this is a much more difficult performance than breaking a horse with a western saddle.

I am of the opinion that there are few better horsemen than those found in the western states and provinces of Canada and that there must be some reason why in Australia men can break horses with the equipment he describes. I have seen many men try to ride a bucking horse with an English saddle, and though some of them have done so, it was never on a real pitching horse.

Any information you can give me on this subject, *either on the tack used*, the *class of horses*, and the relative *merits of the riders* will be received with gratitude, as I'm not so cocksure as my friend, nor have I the knowledge of the methods used in the Antipodes.

—J. B. HARSTONE, D. S. O. O B. E.,
Caulfield, B. C., Canada

Reply by Major R. Ernest Dupuy:—Your query is intriguing. To answer it in full would be to publish a resumé of men's mastery over horses through the ages, and even then the conclusions could never be to the satisfaction of all concerned. If you want me to commit myself to an opinion upon the respective merits of the horsemen of Canada and Australia, I just won't do it. There are almost as many definite schools of thought upon what constitutes a good saddle and seat as there are nations. It seems to me that Australia has stuck to the "old country" ideas, while Canada has felt the influence of our American western school, which is descended from the Hispano-Moorish.

The "Aussies" use, in general, a flat saddle of English type, with the development of a knee-roll for protection against brush. This knee-roll is also as much an aid to mastering a bucking horse as the bucking-roll developed for our modern professional rodeos—themselves developed to a highly artificial stage with chronic buckers. To me, the western saddle with its high horn and swelling cantle give almost as secure a seat as would a jousting saddle of medieval times. On the other hand you could not pay me to ride a bucking horse in a stock saddle. I'm afraid of what that horn might do to me if we took a roll together. The stock saddle is the product of necessity. A man must have something to snub his rope on in handling cattle.

The horseman who is brought up in a flat saddle belongs to the school which considers that a horse must be trained. The horseman making use of the stock type breaks his

mount. That is, the first makes use of will power, the second of rule by force to attain the same end. It is my opinion, based upon experience, that a rider accustomed to a flat saddle will give as good an account of himself on a given bucking horse as a man of similar attainments accustomed to a stock saddle. But I cannot agree that ability to stick on a bucking horse is a proof of equestrian prowess. If one cannot give a bucker a run for his money one had better give up all thought of attaining horsemanship. On the other hand, once an animal has given proof that he cannot be cured of vicious bucking he should be destroyed.

As to respective merits, Britain found out in the Boer War what the Strathcona Horse could do, while in the World War our friends from "down under", brigaded with fox-hunting English Yoemanry boys in the Desert Mounted Corps, accomplished one of the most outstanding feats of cavalry campaigning in the world—with Allenby in Sinai and Palestine.

American cavalry in the Civil War—on both sides, gave proof of what could be accomplished by the mounted arm. (Incidentally, it took a lot of training and cost much horseflesh to produce the finished product on the United States side, as records testify). Out of that came the McClellen saddle, the best purely military saddle so far designed. Turn to the other side of the world and ponder upon the horsemanship of Genghis Khan's Mongol hordes, who made the most astounding cavalry campaigns, perched on rigs bearing no resemblance to either Western stock or flat saddle of today.

No. Comparisons are odious. We either ride or we don't. And we each ride best in the rig to which we are accustomed and which was developed for our own particular purpose.

I believe that Australia went into the raising of good saddle horses earlier than they did in Canada due to the demand from India for cavalry horses; hence the expression "Waler" which denoted originally not a breed but an animal shipped from New South Wales, and is now colloquially used for any Australian horse.

To return again to bucking horses, I do not think that the western mustang has the edge on any other animal. A bad horse is a bad horse anywhere, no matter what his breed, and if he is the saddle type and vicious he will always put up a nasty fight.

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Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, 1354 N. 4th St., Columbus, Ohio.

Texas Centennial Exposition—RANDOLPH PRESTON, 5419 Richmond Ave., Dallas, Texas.

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, 125 Lambert Rd., Jenkintown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of Education, New York University, Washington Square, New York, N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American; north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Automobiles and Aircraft Engines: *design, operation and maintenance*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachute gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Ethnology: (*Eskimo*)—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Forestry: *in the United States; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, Chapel Hill, N. C.

Fur Farming—FRED L. BOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, New York.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mining: *territory anywhere in North America. Mining law, prospecting outfitting; any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Vehicles: *operation, legislative restrictions and traffic*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 3508 Kings College Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places, general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Precious and semi-precious stones: *cutting and polishing of gem materials; technical information*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 901-902 Shreve Bldg., 210 Post Road, San Francisco, Calif.

Radio: *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

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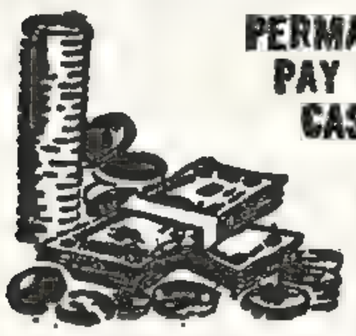

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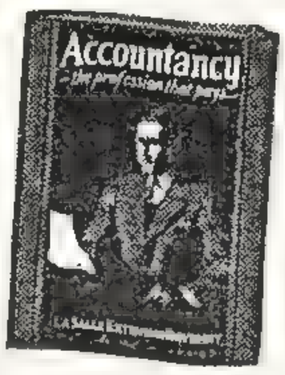

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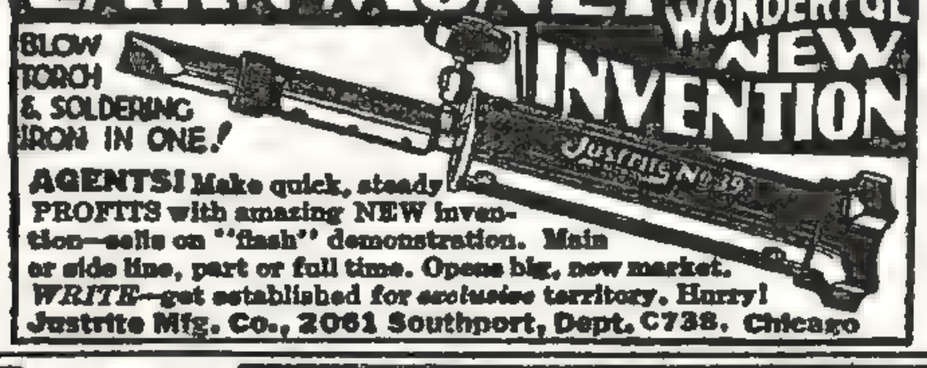

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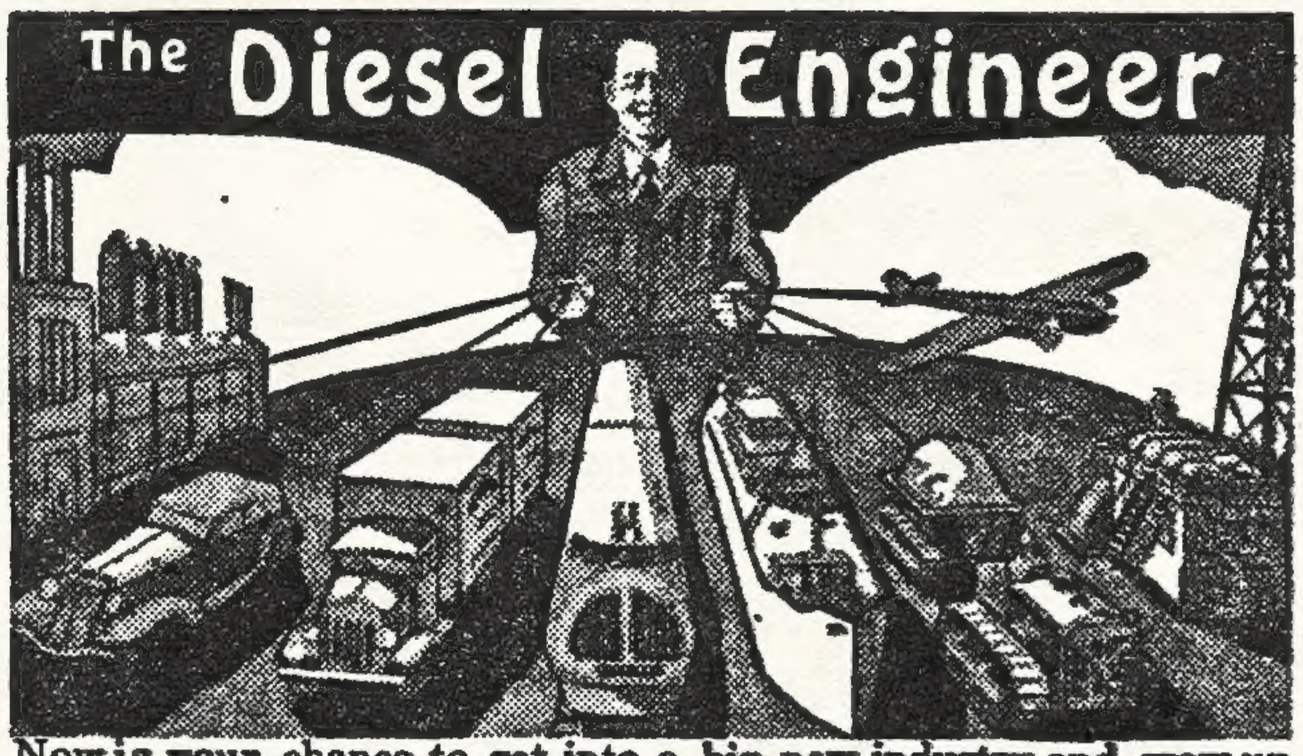

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29x5.00-19	2.65	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05
5.25-17	2.90	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15
5.50-17	3.35	1.15
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15
6.00-17	3.40	1.15
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15
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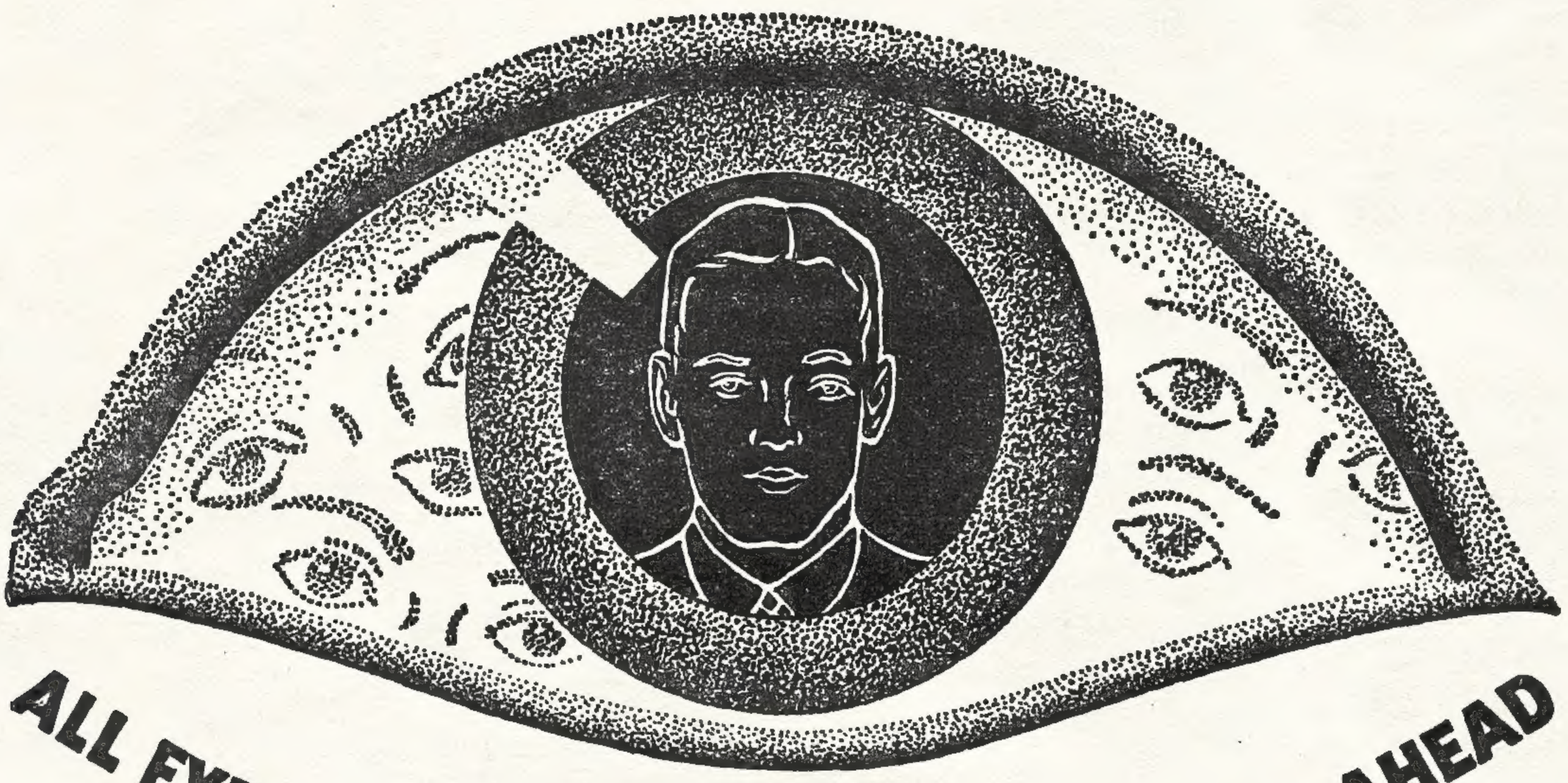
Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65	7.50-20	$6.95	3.75
6.50-20	4.45	1.95	8.25-20	8.95	$4.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95	9.00-20	10.95	5.65
			9.75-20	13.95	6.45

ALL OTHER SIZES DEALERS WANTED

SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($4.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct **5 per cent** if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED—HEAVY GAUGE CIRCULAR MOLDED. Guard against price advances. Order Now. **We agree to replace at half price any tire failing to give 9 months' service.**

PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.
2328-30 S. Michigan Ave. Dept. 2070-A, Chicago, Ill.



ALL EYES ARE ON THE MAN WHO LOOKS AHEAD

A MAN cannot conceal ability. And the man who is determined to go some place and is doing something about it cannot conceal that either. His associates feel it and his superiors recognize it. The man who looks ahead knows the importance of training, and other men who have looked ahead and gone some place know that I. C. S. offers the right kind of training. Look ahead — mail this coupon!

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★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

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☐ Architect
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Building Estimating
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Structural Draftsman
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Management of Inventions
☐ Electrical Engineer
☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
☐ Boilermaker
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Telegraph Engineer
☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio
☐ Mechanical Engineering
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker
☐ Patternmaker
☐ Diesel Engines
☐ Aviation Engines
☐ Automobile Mechanic
☐ Refrigeration
☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting
☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation
☐ Air Conditioning
☐ Steam Engineer
☐ Steam Electric Engineer
☐ Marine Engineer
☐ R. R. Locomotives
☐ R. R. Section Foreman
☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen
☐ Highway Engineering
☐ Civil Engineering
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Chemistry
☐ Pharmacy
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☐ Mine Foreman
☐ Navigation
☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Agriculture
☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

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☐ Office Management
☐ Industrial Management
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Accountancy
☐ Cost Accountant
☐ C. P. Accountant
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Secretarial Work
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☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Service Station Salesmanship
☐ First Year College
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☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ High School Subjects
☐ College Preparatory
☐ Illustrating
☐ Cartooning
☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

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If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

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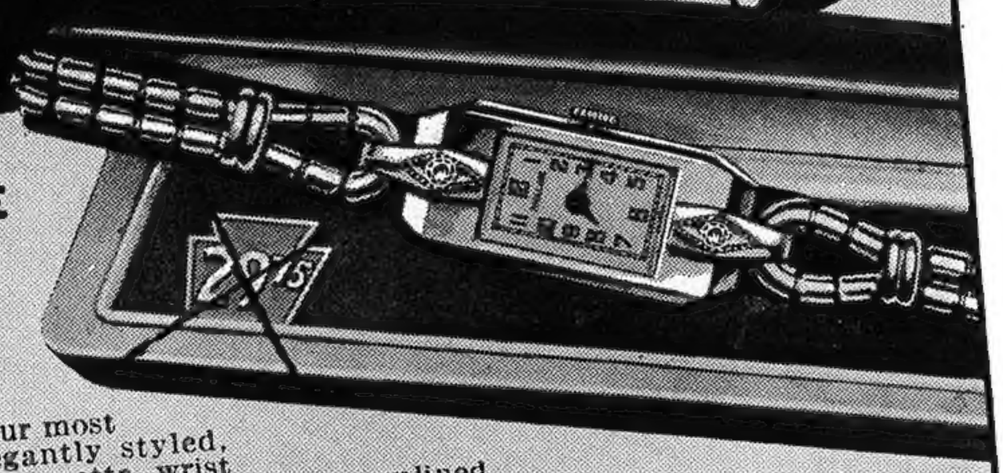

2 Diamond BAGUETTE

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$1.98 a month

LA-1. . . Now at our most liberal terms! Elegantly styled, modern, genuine Baguette wrist watch at an amazingly low price. The streamlined white, lifetime case is set with 2 brilliant, genuine diamonds and fitted with a fully guaranteed and dependable movement. Smart, link bracelet to match. $29.75 value specially offered at $19.75. **Nothing down — Only $1.98 a month.**

MEN, Look!!

17 Jewel WALTHAM "Diplomat"

Now only $24.75

Handsome Genuine leather strap included free!

LA-2 . . . Where could you duplicate this? Factory guaranteed Famous 17 Jewel WALTHAM "Diplomat" — offered at a sensationally low price. Permanent white case, richly engraved and correct in every detail. Fitted with link bracelet to match and smart, new extra leather strap. By special permission ROYAL now offers this $37.50 value, complete for only $24.75. **No Money Down — only $2.48 a month.**

NO DEPOSIT-NO C.O.D.-10 MONTHS to PAY!

Only $27.85 for Both

$2.79 a month

5 Diamonds

LA-3 . . . "LADY DIANE" DUO — exquisitely matched engagement and wedding ring ensemble of beautifully engraved 14K Solid White Gold. The specially selected, dazzling genuine blue-white center diamond in the engagement ring is made even more beautiful by the two brilliant diamonds on each side; the wedding ring is exquisitely engraved to match. **No Money Down—Only $2.79 a month for both complete.**

Only $19.75

$1.98 a month

LA-4 . . . A smart, modern, square prong engagement ring of high quality at an amazingly low price. The fiery, brilliant genuine blue-white diamond is set in a richly hand engraved and milgrained ring of 14K Solid White Gold. Specially priced at $19.75—During this special "new customer" drive our terms are: **Nothing Down—Only $1.98 a mo.**

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LA-5 . . . Another famous WALTHAM—one of America's greatest watches at a sensationally low price! Handsomely engraved 12 size white lifetime case; factory guaranteed, accurate and dependable 17 Jewel WALTHAM movement; complete with engraved knife and chain to match. ALL for $19.75 — **No Money Down — only $1.98 a month.**

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